

Cork County Council

Draft Recreation and Amenity Policy 2024



Comhairle Contae Chorcaí
Cork County Council

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PART 1

Policy Scope and Definitions



PART 1

1.1 INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND, SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1.1** The purpose of this document is to set out appropriate policy and strategy recommendations for the planning and provision of public open space/amenity space and outdoor type recreation facilities in County Cork. This policy has been prepared following a review of the 2006 Cork County Council Recreation and Amenity Policy. It has been drafted to take into account the latest Cork County Development Plan 2022 as well as other relevant national policy, guidelines and best practice which have been published since the 2006 policy.
- 1.1.2** A key concept is understanding open space/amenity space as part of Green Infrastructure and understanding the multifunctional roles (including recreational) that amenity spaces can provide. The focus of this particular policy is the provision of green space and amenities (facilitating both active and passive recreation) at the local level and more broadly the provision of more strategic green and blue infrastructure.
- 1.1.3** The policy considers the advancement of and makes recommendations in relation to the strategic approach within the County (and at settlement level) and sets out a development level approach and standards for recreation and amenity provision. Policy and actions are set out as considered appropriate. The main focus of the policy is publicly owned and/or maintained land, or land which is capable of being taken in charge, the primary use of which is for outdoor recreation and amenity (both active and passive) but it also provides broader guidance and applicable standards for those seeking to carry out development.

1.2 POLICY LAYOUT

- 1.2.1** The policy is laid out as follows:

Part 1 Policy Scope and Definitions - Sets out scope of the policy and relevant definitions

Part 2 Overview of Policy Context/Guidelines

Part 3 Setting the Scene - Policy Considerations

Part 4 Strategic Policy Approach to Planning for Green Space and Outdoor Amenities

Part 5 Development Level Approach – Public (Amenity) Open Space

1.3 DEFINITIONS OVERVIEW

What is public (amenity) open space?

- 1.3.1** Public open space encompasses the variety of spaces within the urban environment that are readily and freely accessible to the wider community for recreation and enjoyment. For the purposes of this policy, 'Open Space/Amenity Space' is defined as:

“space which is accessible to the public, is open-air and may be in public, shared or private ownership (when accessible to the public), the primary use of which is for outdoor recreation and amenity”.

1.3.2 The range of typologies¹ which sit under the category of ‘publicly useable’ open space are considered to be as follows:

- Public Parks and Gardens
- Amenity Greenspace - Residential
- Playspace for Children and Teenagers
- Playing Fields
- Green Corridors
- Natural/Semi Natural Greenspace
- Allotments & Community Growing Spaces
- Civic Space

1.3.3 Public open space is usually the principal form of public amenity at the neighbourhood scale. Generally this ranges from small pocket parks/residential spaces up to larger green spaces/local parks. As a green infrastructure asset such spaces have the potential to provide a range of valuable functions (multifunctional).

Value of Public Open Space/Green Space

1.3.4 Research relating to the economic and social benefits of open space shows that it is the very local spaces (and their quality) which has the greatest impact on quality of life and to the ongoing success of neighbourhoods as places².

1.3.5 The best open spaces are those which not only provide for safe play, passive and active recreation and relaxation but also contribute to the development of good placemaking and a sense of identity and community. Open spaces can support biodiversity and pollinator friendly species, they can assist in carbon capture and provide valuable habitat. They can also support the provision of nature-based solutions in particular Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SUDS). (see also Part 3 – Policy Considerations)

Public Open Space as Green Infrastructure

1.3.6 All open space is an important element of Green Infrastructure. The term ‘Green Infrastructure’ is used to describe the interconnected networks of land and water all around us that sustain environmental quality and enrich our quality of life. This includes the nature conservation areas, parks, open space, rivers, floodplains, wetlands, woodlands, farmland and coastal areas which surround and are threaded through our villages, towns and urban areas. Green Infrastructure provision is not limited to traditional green spaces such as parks and other open spaces but can involve various interventions to thread nature into streetscapes or provide corridors of connectivity between the green and blue infrastructure features described above, known as ‘assets’. Like any other type of infrastructure, these assets will only continue to provide us with benefits if we actively plan, invest in and manage them to ensure that they are utilised sustainably.

1.3.7 Public open space (and the public open space network) forms an important part of the wider green infrastructure network and should be considered within this context. One of the principal aims of Chapter 14 (Green Infrastructure) of the Cork County Development Plan 2022 is to strengthen the overall green infrastructure network.

1.3.8 A healthy and well-connected Green Infrastructure network provides a range of social, economic and ecological benefits. From a placemaking perspective, it is an asset that can raise the profile of the County, influence business decisions to invest and encourage people to live and work in an area. As an integral component of building well designed and sustainable communities it is key to the success of the overall concept of connected, compact growth avoiding the damage created to the environment and climate through urban sprawl and facilitating improved physical

¹ Planning Advice Note 65: Planning and open space – the Scottish Government (2008)

² <http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk>

PART 1



and mental wellbeing. In this way Green Infrastructure is a holistic approach to land use planning which balances spatial, social and economic development in a way that enhances the natural environment. It is now recognised as a cornerstone within resilient places, being a 'must have' rather than a 'nice to have'.

Note: Although referred to as 'Green Infrastructure', it is accepted that this term also can refer to different elements of Blue Infrastructure i.e. includes coastline, rivers and streams, reservoirs, lakes and ponds, etc.

PART 2

Overview of Policy Context/Guidelines



PART 2

In carrying out research for this Draft Recreation and Amenity Policy, a wide range of policy and guidance were reviewed. Regard is had to the planning policy hierarchy, to other policies and guidelines of the Government, to local policy documents and to other guidance.

2.1 NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

2.1.1 The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government’s high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth of the Country’s population by over one million people to the year 2040. One of the ten strategic outcomes on which the NPF is based is ‘enhanced amenity and heritage’.

2.1.2 The NPF focuses on People, Homes and Communities and the importance of quality of life for the country’s citizens. The framework acknowledges that this is influenced by many factors including natural and living environment, health and leisure & social interactions.

Southern Region Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy 2019-2031

2.1.3 The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) is a settlement and economic growth strategy that seeks to realise the National Planning Framework at a regional level. One of the key elements of the RSES strategy is the strengthening of recreational assets and natural and built heritage as a key component of Quality of Life.



Fig 2.1 – Elements Supporting Quality of Life (extracted from National Planning Framework/ Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy)

2.2 POLICIES OF GOVERNMENT

2.2.1 This draft policy is not only affected by planning policy but is affected by many streams of government policy in relation to health and wellbeing, sports, disability inclusion, biodiversity and play, for example. Where relevant these have been considered during its preparation.

2.3 LOCAL POLICY

2.3.1 Cork County Council has in place a number of plans and strategies to shape the development and plan for the future of Cork County. Of particular importance is the Cork County Development Plan.

Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

- 2.3.2** The Cork County Development Plan which was finalised in 2022 represents the most up to date planning policy document covering the County. It aligns with National and Regional Policy and was prepared taking into account various Section 28 Guidelines many of relevance to Recreation and Amenity.
- 2.3.4** Chapter 14 Green Infrastructure and Recreation aims to advance the Green Infrastructure approach in the County setting out some development level requirements as well as more broad strategic requirements with the high-level aim pursued being the co-ordinated provision and protection of Green Infrastructure as a County asset. The plan also introduced a new green infrastructure zoning now widely applied at settlement level with the aim to reflect the more multi-functional nature of green spaces
- 2.3.5** A key objective of the chapter is the strengthening and enhancement of the Green Infrastructure network to serve the various needs of communities as well as being a key contributor to climate mitigation and climate adaptation. A key element in this overall approach is to facilitate the development of linkages or green corridors between assets so that the value can be enhanced and the network strengthened. The multifunctional and holistic benefits that Green Infrastructure can provide when properly planned and considered are also highlighted. There are many wide-ranging Green Infrastructure objectives in the chapter (see G114-1 TO G114-6 inclusive) which set out various requirements. These objectives and their requirements and considerations are also complemented by other objectives within the 2022 County Development Plan (see Appendix A for list) as well as its overall vision and aims. Of relevance also are associated chapters on placemaking, transport and mobility, biodiversity, climate action, etc.

Cork County Council Local Economic and Community Plan 2024-2030

- 2.3.6** The Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) is a statutory plan prepared under the Local Government Reform Act of 2014 and sets out high-level goals, objectives and actions needed to promote and support economic development and local and community development over a six-year period. The recently adopted Cork County LECP 2024-2030 includes a range of strategic high-level goals and objectives which are considered complementary to this draft policy.

Cork County Council Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

- 2.3.7** The Cork County Council Climate Action Plan was recently adopted. Cork County Council use its Climate Action Plan in planning how it will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from across its own assets and infrastructure, whilst also taking on a broader role to influence, facilitate and co-ordinate the climate actions of communities and other stakeholders and what it will do to advocate for climate action in County Cork. The plan sets out a series of actions many of which overlap with themes in relation to green infrastructure and biodiversity. Climate considerations have been to the forefront in consideration of this draft policy (see part 3).

2.4 OPEN SPACE, PARKS AND RECREATIONAL STANDARDS

- 2.4.1** The most up to date key documents reviewed with regard to open space and recreational standards were:
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2024) 'Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines'
 - Field in Trust (England) (2020) 'Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play Beyond the Six Acre Standard'.

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- 2.4.2** The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024) replace the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines for Planning Authorities published in 2009. In terms of open space/green infrastructure some of the key high-level recommendations of the guidelines identified are:
- Development Plans should include or be informed by a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and strategy for the provision of an integrated hierarchy of public open spaces/parks and corridors across the plan area.
 - Local plans and individual planning applications should plan:
 - for an integrated network of multi-functional and interlinked urban green spaces
 - for protection, restoration and enhancement of natural features, biodiversity and landscapes and promotion of urban greening and nature based solutions
 - Public open spaces should be designed to be multifunctional in nature. Access needs to be balanced with the need to protect the environment.
 - Public open space strategy to include objectives in relation to provision of:
 - Regional, district and local level public parks and greenways.
 - Public open space provided as part of new development proposals
 - Strategy should be informed by the objectives of the RSES and any regional GBI strategy.
- 2.4.3** Whilst there is no set standard of open space provision per settlement in Ireland, the guidelines recommended that provision should take into account the needs of the planned population, protected zones, landscape character and statutory obligations to protect certain habitats and biodiversity. Ideally all residents should have access to a multi-functional public open space within walking distance of their home.
- 2.4.4** The guidelines also include development standards for public open space (policy and objective 5.1) which requires that development plans include a public open space provision requirement of not less than a minimum of 10% of net site area and not more than a maximum of 15% of net site area save in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.4.5** The UK Field in Trust guidance document sets out contemporary international standards for Parks, Open Spaces and Recreation which are widely referenced in Britain and by a number of Irish local authorities (see next section Irish Local Authorities' Standards).

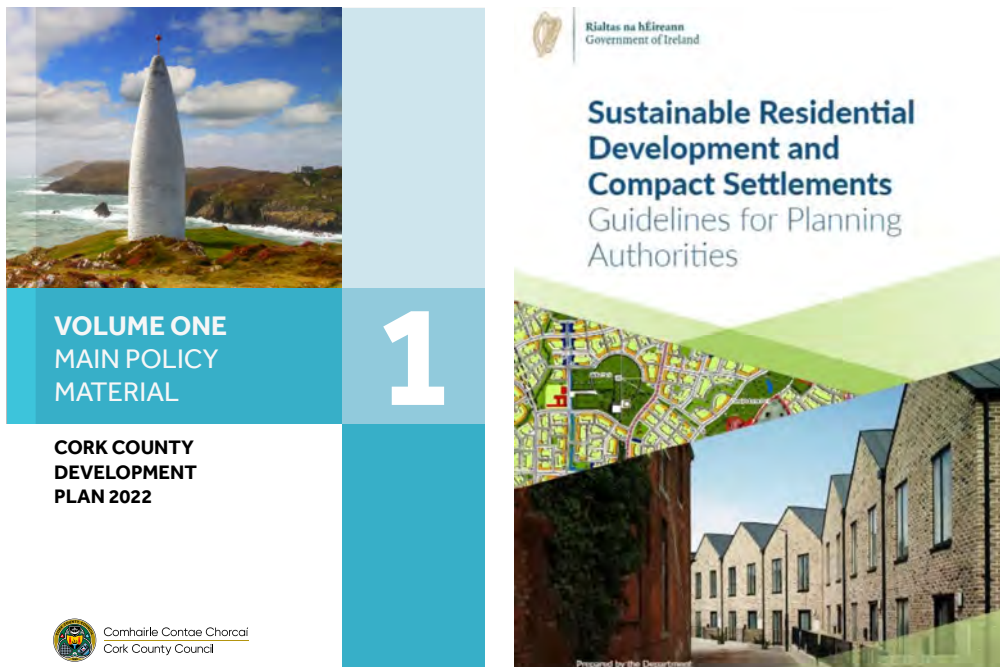
2.5 IRISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES' STANDARDS

- 2.5.1** Taking a lead from national policy and guidelines to date, many local authorities support a strategic approach when it comes to planning for parks and other amenities and include policy objectives around this in their Development Plans. Many local authorities also include Hierarchy and Accessibility Standards for parks/public open space. Reference to and objectives in relation to a 2.5ha open space per 1,000 population standard are included in many Development Plans.
- 2.5.2** Most local authorities set out site level quantitative standards for public open space while others include qualitative requirements. A few (albeit not many) local authorities have specific development level standards for specific items of leisure infrastructure to be provided based on the scale of the development. Often these standards have been informed by separate Open Space or Recreation Needs Studies and where provided appear to closely match the Fields in Trust (UK guidelines).

2.5.3 In general, there exists a lack of consistency of approach in relation to provision of standards in Irish local authorities likely due to a lack of national guidance, resource issues and how the amenity function is conducted in the particular local authority. Where local authorities do apply specific leisure infrastructure standards (for example regarding provision of equipment) they generally have the benefit of a dedicated Parks Departments who can oversee the application of the policy and the delivery and maintenance of infrastructure.

2.6 POLICY CONTEXT OVERVIEW

2.6.1 There have been a lot of new guidelines, national and indeed local policy since the previous Cork County Council Recreation and Amenity Policy (2006) which have refocused priorities and expectations about how to consider development, its associated amenities (especially open space) and how we deliver sustainable communities. The UN Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 have shaped much of this policy. Part 3 (next section) outlines some of the various policy considerations that have been taken into account in the development of the new draft policy.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



PART 3

Setting the Scene – Policy Considerations



3.1 POLICY THEMES

- 3.1.1** It was considered that the Green and Blue infrastructure (GBI) themes set out in chapter 14 (Green Infrastructure and Recreation) of the Cork County Development Plan 2022 represent appropriate and relevant themes for the development of a recreation and amenity policy.

TABLE 3.1: GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE THEMES FOR CORK COUNTY

Theme 1 - Accessibility, Recreation, Health and Wellbeing	Theme 2 - Natural and Cultural Heritage	Theme 3 - Water Management	Theme 4 - Climate Resiliency
Accessibility, recreation and health and well-being, is concerned with the nature, quantity, quality and continuity of connections of green and blue infrastructure and the ease of access to open spaces, greenways and other recreational assets.	Natural and cultural heritage is concerned with the range of natural and man-made assets of heritage value in the County. These include areas of importance for biodiversity, such as watercourses, woodlands, and coastline, and cultural assets such as important monuments, buildings and landscapes.	Water Management is based on the role and potential of the green and blue infrastructure to better manage surface and flood water and to contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of water in the County.	Climate Resiliency is based on the role and potential of green and blue infrastructure, particularly through the ecosystem services that they provide, to contribute to climate mitigation and climate adaptation.

Fig 3.1 - Green and Blue Infrastructure Themes as identified in the Cork County Development Plan 2022

- 3.1.2** The broader Development Plan quality of life principles and Objective PL3-3 Delivering Quality and Inclusive Places were also taken into account and it was considered that these alongside the themes above appropriately complement an overall overarching theme of Healthy Placemaking.
- 3.1.3** Healthy Placemaking seeks to protect and enhance the unique identity and character of places and to facilitate improvements to human wellbeing and the quality of life that comes from the interaction of people and their environment.

3.2 ROLE OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

- 3.2.1** To have accessible and usable outdoor amenity/green space close to our homes and in our communities is recognised and appreciated as a fundamental component of healthy placemaking and a healthy lifestyle. Public amenity spaces of all scales are vital areas for different types of recreation.
- 3.2.2** Public open space can have a positive impact on physical and mental wellbeing as it can provide spaces to meet, interact, exercise, and relax. It needs to be appropriately designed, properly located and well maintained to encourage its use. It is one of the key elements in defining the quality of the residential environment. Well-designed high-quality space is even more important in higher density residential developments.
- 3.2.3** At the neighbourhood scale public amenity space/open space and its associated ecology represents an important building block in the settlement scale Green Infrastructure network the strengthening of which is an objective of Chapter 14 of the Cork County Development Plan (CDP) 2022. From this local/neighbourhood scale it has the potential to link to more strategic green infrastructure and into the wider countryside.

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3.3 PLACEMAKING (AND THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR PUBLIC OPEN SPACES/GREEN SPACES)

3.3.1 The policy and literature review carried out as part of this policy preparation identifies that the range of considerations to take into account when contemplating public open space provision/design today can be lengthy and complex. The expectations/demands for parks/public open spaces are increasing with the emphasis now firmly fixed on creating high quality spaces (placemaking) that should be more multifunctional in nature. Multi-disciplinary collaboration will be an essential element in delivering successful places.



Fig 3.2 – Wordcloud highlighting the range of considerations (non-exhaustive) when planning for amenity/open space

3.4 PLACEMAKING FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

3.4.1 Placemaking is a multi-faceted and holistic approach to the planning, design and management of the built environment through collaboration to ensure that a location is accessible, diverse, attractive and positively perceived. Good placemaking contributes to people’s health, happiness, well-being and cultural experience.

- 3.4.2** The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines 2024 recognise that the availability of accessible and high quality public open spaces/parks within all settlements that are part of a wider green and blue infrastructure network are an important element in creating sustainable communities. Green space is vital for providing opportunities for all sections of society to enjoy the environment whether through play, volunteering or just relaxing.
- 3.4.3** The provision of a network of well-designed and cared-for open spaces adds to the character of places where people want to live, work and visit. Open spaces can also provide the vital Green Infrastructure that enables us to deal with floods or mitigate and adapt to climate change while providing wildlife habitats, sporting facilities or beautiful parks.



Fig 3.3 High quality placemaking – even more important at higher densities (Photo source: Bridgewater Homes)

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3.4.4 Green spaces provide important recreational and health benefits and can encourage social cohesion by acting as a multifunctional community resource. They improve the quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive spaces which can also increase property values and desirability. Increasingly developers understand that home buyers desire to live in a high-quality environment and are now using this as a selling point. Similarly Housing Agencies are also recognising the importance of quality of place when developing communities.



Figure 3.4 – Housing Agencies/Developers recognising the positive benefits of quality placemaking

3.4.5 Parks and larger recreational spaces are now benchmarked by standards such as the Green Flag quality standard³. As a recognised international standard for parks and green spaces, holding a Green Flag Award brings with it a vast amount of prestige (See Appendix D – Green Flag checklist). It is also an evident example of civic achievement and provides communities with a great sense of civic pride.



Fig 3.5 Green Flag standard for Parks and Public Spaces (Millenium Park - Galway)

3 Raising the Standard – The Green Flag Award guidance manual (2016)

- 3.4.6** UK 2018 research identifies that parks and green spaces are proven to help people stay physically and mentally well; places where we can all move, breathe, run and play⁴. The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024) recognise that Public Open Spaces should be designed to cater for a range of active and passive recreational needs (including play, physical activity, active travel, cultural uses and community gardens and allotments, as appropriate to the context) and to conserve and restore nature and biodiversity.
- 3.4.7** Several aspects of neighbourhood design (such as walkability and mixed land use) can also maximise opportunities for social engagement, active travel and green corridors⁵ or networks. Modern amenity spaces can and should be designed to enhance mobility and be more socially inclusive and age friendly. The design and layout of a development, the public realm and supporting infrastructure should incorporate universal design principles and safety considerations helping vulnerable users (including older persons) to move about with increased ease (having due regard for wayfinding, permeability and natural surveillance).



Fig 3.6 Universal Design Principles applied to a public bench. Source: *Landscaping and Biodiversity Guide for New Developments (Clúid Housing)*

⁴ *Revaluing Parks and Green Spaces – Fields and Trust Report, 2018*

⁵ See 'Corridor Concept' Chapter 14 *Green Infrastructure and Recreation (section 14.1.13 and GI 14-2) Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028*

PART 3

3.4.8 Attractive, well-designed cycleways and footpaths integrated into the landscape are more likely to be used than roadside routes, improving accessibility and allowing the whole community to enjoy the space. There is a need to plan for well-connected neighbourhoods and a distribution of activities to ensure that day to day services and amenities (including parks and open spaces) are accessible and within walking distances of homes and workplaces. The implementation of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) for instance will be critical in ensuring sustainable mobility and the creation of high quality and attractive settlements (see also section on Permeability Statement/DMURS in Appendix B).

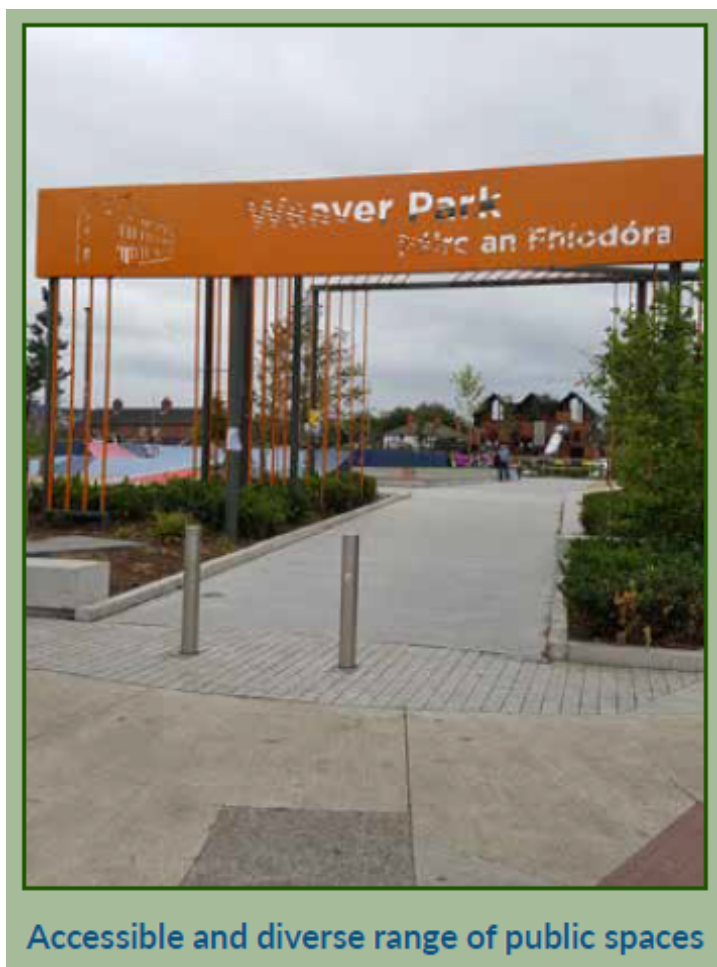


Fig 3.7 Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines – recognise the importance of diversity.

Fig 3.8 - Planning for Sustainable Communities (Some elements)



15 Minute City

Source: Carlo Moreno, Coutay Geogia pozoukidou, in 15 minute City:Decomposing the New Planning Eutopia



National policy requires planning for integrated Green and Blue Infrastructure (interconnected green spaces and corridors)

Sustainable communities with enhanced mobility and socially inclusive

Mental Health Benefits

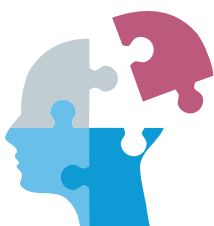
“Better mental health, better quality of life”

In Ireland, middle-aged and older adults walking 150 minutes per week report a better mental health status, better quality of life, and overall wellbeing

According to the CSO, of the respondents who spent time in natural spaces over the past six months

93%
Felt happier afterwards

97%
Felt happier



Environmental Benefits

“By being in green or blue natural spaces we foster a bond to nature which helps us become more environmentally aware.”



Physical Health Benefits

“Inactivity increases the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes by 25-30% and shortens lifespan by 3-5 years.”



Green Infrastructure can provide health (physical and mental) and environmental benefits

PART 3

Climate Resilience and Biodiversity Enhancement

3.4.9 Nowadays, there is also an urgent need to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. Planning in relation to public spaces and amenities must identify opportunities for active travel, enhanced biodiversity, providing for sustainable water management (SuDS), etc through climate resilient design to help mitigate climate change and offset the effects of extreme weather events.

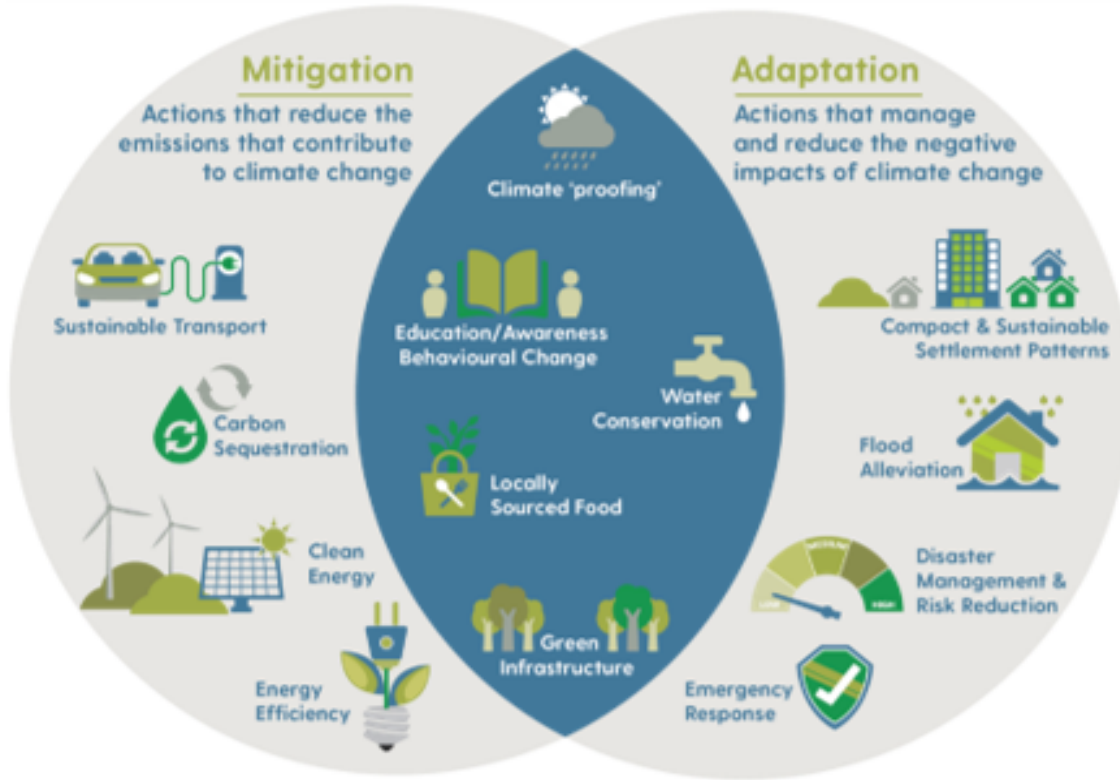


Fig 3.9 Need to be proactively planning for climate action

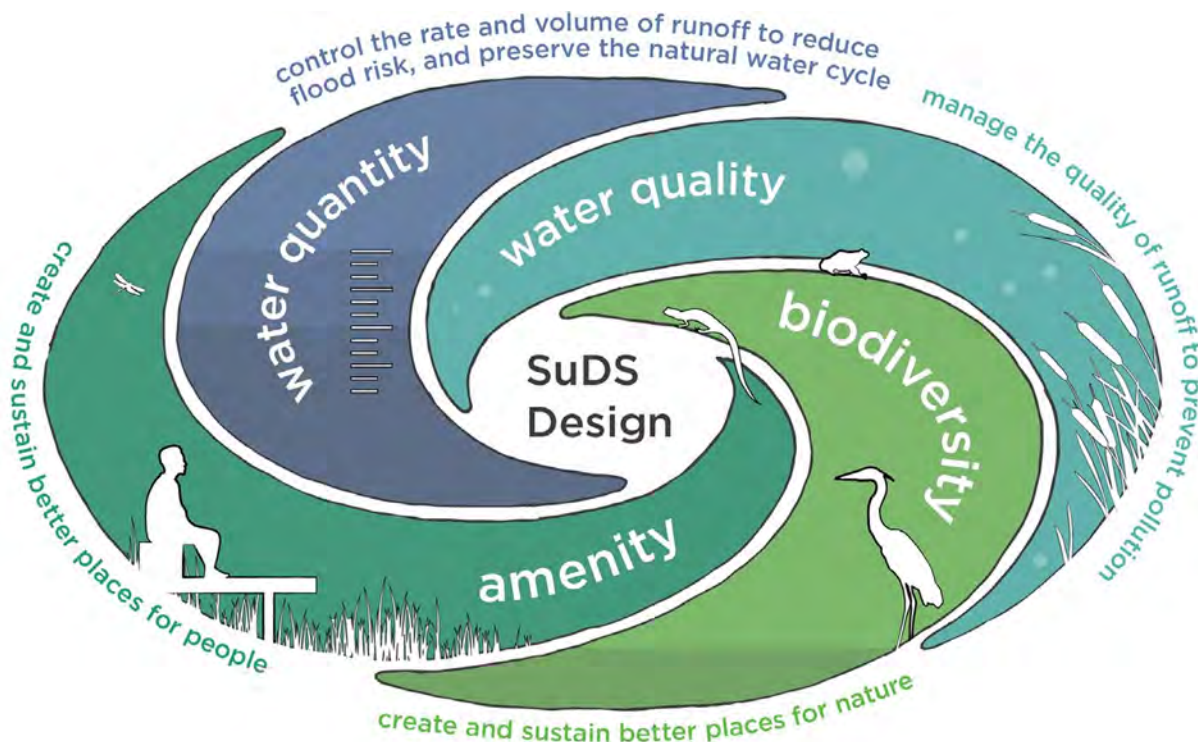


Fig 3.10 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) have the potential to be used as a multifunctional tool within amenity spaces (Source: Dublin City Council Sustainable Drainage Design and Evaluation Guide)



Fig 3.11 Visualisation illustrating how hedgerow can be incorporated into the SuDS drainage design augmenting a riparian corridor Source: Landscaping and Biodiversity Guide for New Developments (Cluid Housing)

3.5 STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.5.1** The provision of open space and green infrastructure into the future, particularly in our settlements must be carefully considered to ensure there is an adequate variety and type of open space and amenities to meet the quality of life needs of citizens and address key issues such as climate action.
- 3.5.2** This policy acknowledges that the delivery of recreation and amenities at a strategic level can be challenging and involves multiple stakeholders. Many government departments, agencies and other organisations have a role to play. The delivery of recreational infrastructure effectively will be very reliant on strong collaboration, co-ordination and partnership between such stakeholders.



Fig 3.12 Recreation Stakeholders – National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027

- 3.5.3** The most fundamental and basic requirement for communities in terms of amenities is the public open (amenity) space provided within the neighbourhood/development. Broader policy, actions and considerations for strategic planning are outlined in Part 4 (Strategic Policy Planning Approach) which will need to be considered over time while the particular focus of this policy is primarily on setting out relevant standards for public open space provision within residential areas (see Part 5 – Development Level Approach).

PART 4

Strategic Policy Approach to Planning for Green Space and Outdoor Amenities



4.1 OVERVIEW

- 4.1.1** There is an evident necessity for strategic and integrated planning if recreation and amenity facilities and associated Green Infrastructure (particularly green public spaces such as parks) are to be provided in the right location and in accordance with required needs to assist in the delivery of resilient sustainable communities. The need to comprehensively plan at this scale is reinforced in policy documents such as the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region as well as other existing and recent guidelines such as the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024).
- 4.1.2** The Cork County Development Plan 2022 represented an important step in establishing some high-level objectives in relation to Green Infrastructure, however, to set out a detailed green infrastructure strategy at countywide and local level including a comprehensive assessment of amenities/recreational needs across the county represents a much more significant undertaking. It is evident, however, that such a countywide/area based audit/needs study and strategy for Green Infrastructure is likely to be required over the coming years to inform both short to medium term planning as well as the preparation of the next Development Plan.
- 4.1.3** This section sets out various policies and actions at both strategic and more general policy level in relation to Recreation and Amenity. There are already a number of objectives set out in relation to Recreation and Amenity in Chapter 14 of the Development Plan 2022 which it is not intended to restate in this policy, however where additional clarity has been required this has been added. Part 5 of this overall policy sets out development level approach and standards.

4.2 STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR RECREATIONAL NEEDS/ NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

- 4.2.1** The Development Plan Guidelines (2022) advise that planning authorities should provide a clear evidence base for amenities policies. The preparation of audits is one way to provide this evidence base to inform plan development and strategy preparation. The 2022 Development Plan Guidelines reference these as 'Community, Social and Cultural Infrastructure Audits' and state that Development Plans should include objectives for these in areas likely to experience significant new development in order to identify gaps and assess future requirements.
- 4.2.2** Though few if any counties appear to have comprehensive County audits to date, increasingly local authorities are including a requirement in their Development Plans to prepare Community and Social Infrastructure Audits/Assessments for large scale developments. Some also require these to be prepared at settlement level. While the content of such audits is not specified, the 2022 Development Plan Guidelines suggest that ongoing monitoring and review should lead to a greater consistency and development of a protocol for the preparation of social audits. Community, Social and Cultural Infrastructure Audits⁶ can represent a more complete assessment of the needs of communities which also includes open space/recreational needs.
- 4.2.3** At a national level Sport Ireland has led the development of the National Database of Sport and Recreation Amenities which it expects to transform how recreational amenities are planned, funded, and managed in Ireland. This database was recently launched (November 2023) including a new website www.getirelandactive.ie and continues to be updated and improved. The ongoing development of this tool has the potential to be of considerable use in assisting evidence-based planning in relation to recreation and amenities.

⁶ Also referred to in the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024)

- 4.2.4** The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024) recognise the importance of having an integrated hierarchy of multifunctional public open spaces and corridors that provide for the recreational needs of the planned population within all settlements. It is logical that any needs assessment should be considered in parallel with the development of the wider open space/green and blue infrastructure strategies proposed by the Guidelines (see next section on Strategy for Green and Blue Infrastructure).
- 4.2.5** Area level studies of recreational needs/audits may not necessarily take place in isolation and may also need to be prepared alongside other plans/studies such as the following (non-exhaustive list):
- Transport Plans (settlement level)
 - Town Centre First Plans
 - Rainwater Management studies/plans
 - Climate Action Plans
 - Biodiversity/green infrastructure/urban greening studies/plans
- 4.2.6** Needs assessments, where prepared, should consult with relevant stakeholders who will play an important role in highlighting community recreational needs and determining where investment priorities should be focused. The council will continue to consult with and work with sporting bodies and community organisations in terms of assessment of demand and provision for recreation and amenity facilities. The Council will also consider the need to request Community, Social and Cultural Infrastructure Audits as part of larger developments.
- 4.2.7** In the absence of detailed needs assessments, the level of interest and commitment from the local community and/or local sporting organisations will be a key determining factor in prioritising the areas, the level and type of facility to be provided. The level, or lack of, existing facilities in the area will also be a determining factor.

POLICY/ACTION – PLANNING FOR RECREATIONAL NEEDS

Policy	The Council will continue to plan for and support the delivery of and refurbishment of recreation and amenity facilities to serve, so far as is possible, the recreational needs of the population it serves.
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4.3 STRATEGY FOR GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE (GBI)

- 4.3.1** The Green (and Blue) Infrastructure (GBI) approach to planning which has become more established in recent years represents a more holistic land use planning approach (including the provision of amenities) recognising the multifunctionality of green spaces. Preparation of Green and Blue Infrastructure plans/strategies by planning authorities are now increasingly common. These aid in informing and guiding the planning and management of green and blue spaces, including rivers, parks and open green spaces as well as advancing the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society. The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines state that Development Plans should include (or be informed by) a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy and include objectives for the conservation, restoration, and enhancement of natural assets and GBI networks and which can be refined further in local statutory plans and guidance documents.

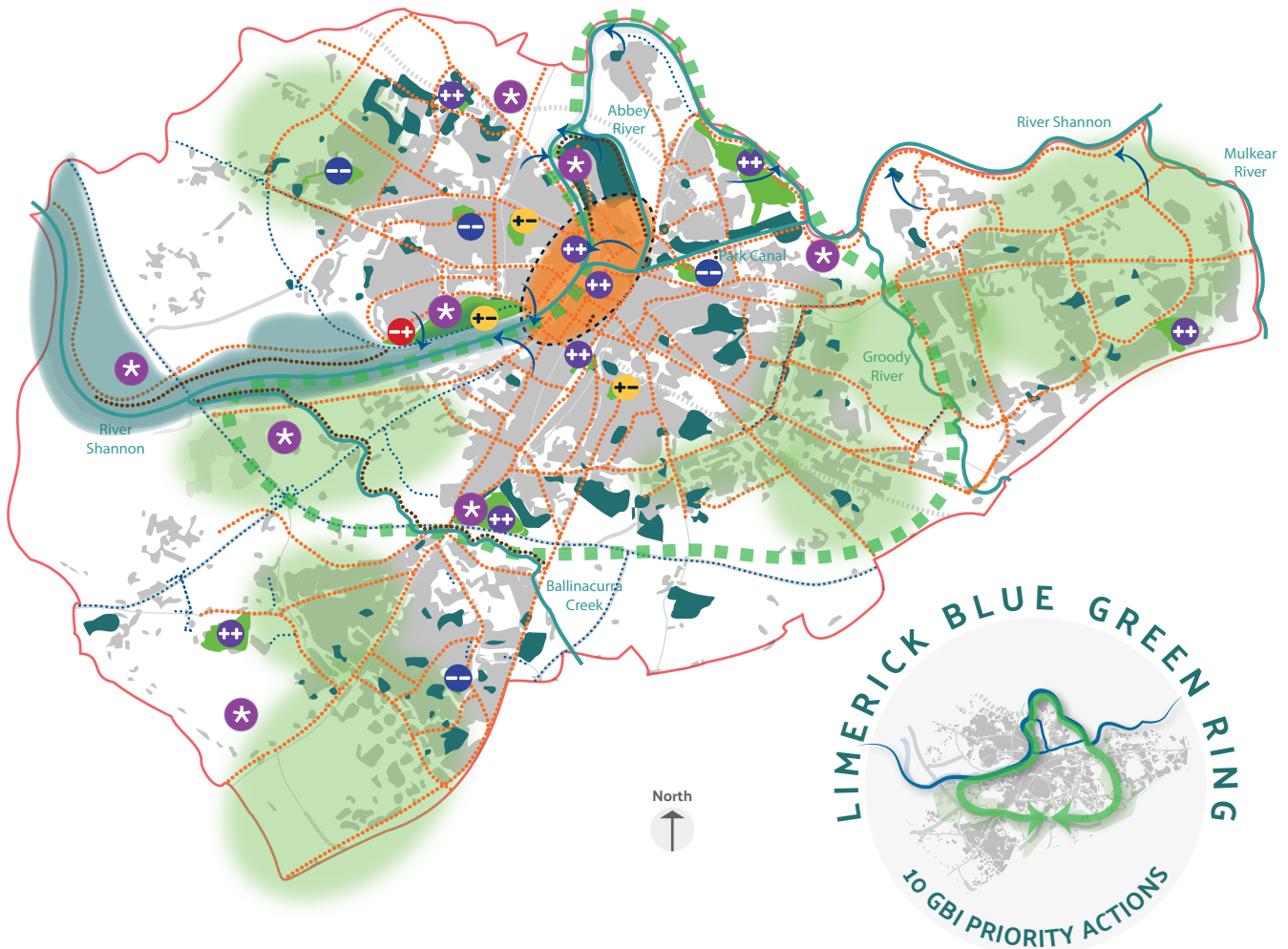


Fig 4.1 – Example. Priority Actions from Limerick City and Environs Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy

4.3.2 There are many types of strategies/plans which focus on the provision of green space/green infrastructure. Green and Blue infrastructure studies/strategies, green space strategies, urban greening plans, etc can often have similar or related aims or purpose. In Galway City for example a Green Spaces Strategy is currently being prepared which looks at recreation and amenity needs as well as ecosystem services⁷/natural capital to address fragmentation of the green network. Green and Blue Infrastructure strategies often highlight the need for additional work/projects including identifying the need for bespoke studies, design guides, education programmes, tree/biodiversity/greening strategies, individual projects, etc.

4.3.3 The 2022 Cork County Development Plan introduced a new green infrastructure zoning to reflect the multifunctional roles of green spaces throughout the county. Although a significant zoned landbank of green infrastructure has been reserved in the Development Plan the preparation of the plan did not permit a detailed determination of recreation and amenity/green infrastructure requirements at either a settlement, area or County level. The bulk of lands zoned are likely to have a passive amenity function into the future (many being zoned due to flood risk, their biodiversity value or contribution to landscape setting) and will continue to remain in private ownership.

⁷ Ecosystem Services are the direct and indirect contributions/benefits of ecosystems to human well-being (see also Development Plan 2022)

- 4.3.4** While protecting strategic landbanks for greenspace/parks is important, more detailed needs assessments/green space strategies can give consideration to the range of functions both active and passive that might be considered within the overall Green Infrastructure network particularly with regard to more formal amenity spaces such as parks which will often have multiple and varied functions. (see also next section on Strategy for Public Open Space/Parks)

4.4 STRATEGY FOR PUBLIC OPEN SPACE/PARKS

- 4.4.1** Both the Development Plan Guidelines (2022) and the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024) advise that as Development Plans are being prepared that they include a strategy for the provision of public open space. The latter Guidelines propose that Development Plans should include a strategy for the provision of an integrated hierarchy of multifunctional public open spaces and corridors that are accessible and provide for the recreational needs of the planned population, while also creating space for nature and ecosystem services. It also proposes that Development Plans should include objectives relating to the provision of various types of parks from local to regional level (see page 46 of the Guidelines).
- 4.4.2** The guidelines acknowledge the more multifunctional role and need for accessible and high quality public open spaces recognising that they are part of the wider Green and Blue Infrastructure network and represent an important part of the composition of sustainable settlements. As already highlighted the need for a more holistic strategy perhaps incorporating both public open space as well as wider Green and Blue Infrastructure should be further considered and a determination on this may be beyond the scope of this policy.
- 4.4.3** At a more local level the preparation of preliminary/indicative masterplans for larger parks/green spaces in which different functions and infrastructural requirements are considered can assist in developing an overall future vision for each space. (See also Part 3 Placemaking (Green Flag Standard) and Appendix D)

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2.0

Water Rock Linear Park The Vision for Water Rock Linear Park

Water-Rock Linear Park will link people and place by providing new pedestrian and cycle links to accessible open spaces. This new park will provide welcome amenities for both existing and new communities locally. Central to the creation of this new destination will be protecting, conserving and enhancing the local natural environment. In addition there will be a small car park, play area, bike trails and open space for informal recreation.

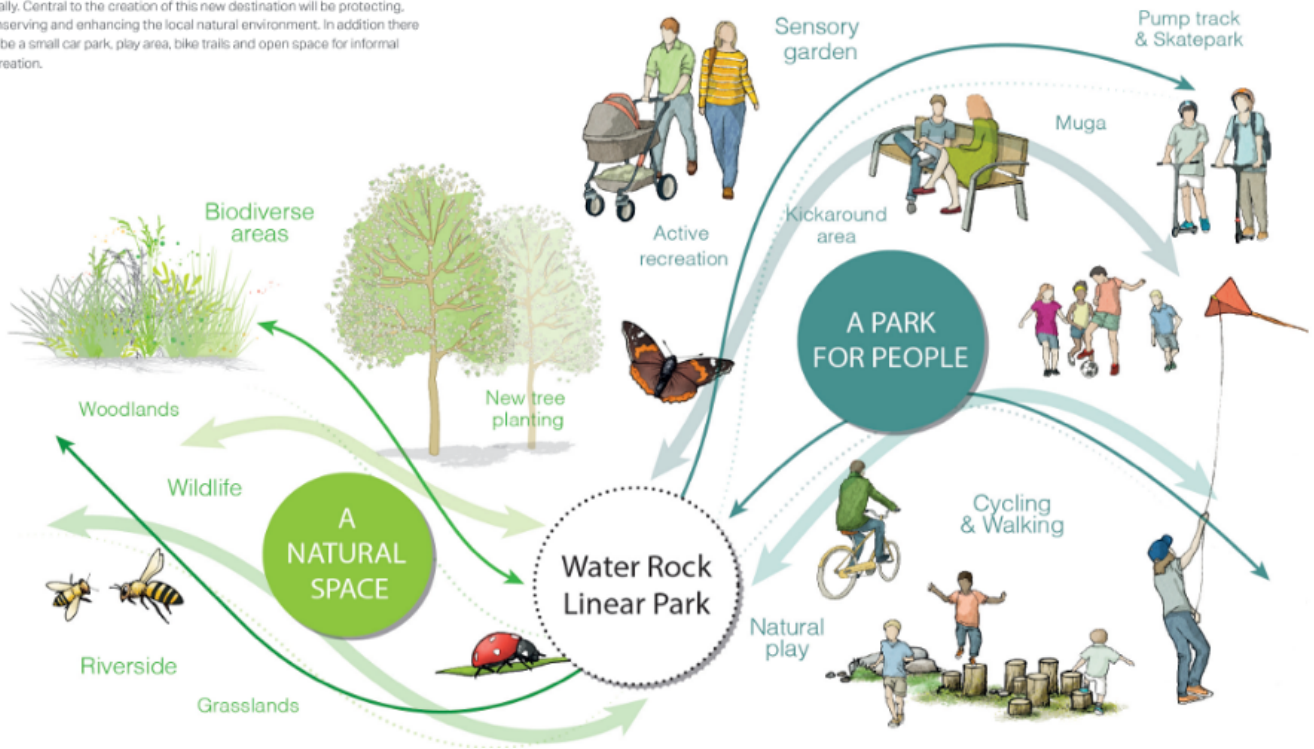


Fig 4.2 - Water Rock Linear Park (Vision) – Part VII Summary of Design Proposals – June 2023

POLICY/ACTION – PLANNING FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACE

Action

Taking into account available resources Cork County Council will consider the most effective way to deliver on the various commitments/ strategies expected from the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Growth Guidelines taking into account Green and Blue Infrastructure, parks and open space and recreational requirements for the County.



Fig 4.3 - Water Rock Linear Park (Design Concept/Masterplan)
– Part VII Summary of Design Proposals – June 2023

4.5 PUBLIC (AMENITY) OPEN SPACE STANDARDS

- 4.5.1** The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Growth Guidelines (2024) require that the public open space strategy in the development plan should include objectives relating to the provision of:
- Regional, district and local level public parks and greenways
 - Public open space provided as part of new development proposals.
- 4.5.2** The Guidelines recognise that while there is no set standard of open space provision per settlement in Ireland opportunities to enhance the overall quantum of public open space and to restore and enhance nature and biodiversity within settlements should be harnessed for example through regeneration or urban enhancement projects and in new development areas. (see page 46 of the Guidelines)
- 4.5.3** The guidelines state that the level of provision should take into account the needs of the planned population, protected zones, landscape character and statutory obligations to protect certain habitats and biodiversity and that all residents within a settlement should have access to multi-functional public open space within walking distance of their home.
- 4.5.4** Standards aside, the Green Infrastructure planning approach represents a more holistic approach to green space planning more focused on qualitative considerations, recreational needs, ecosystem services provided by green spaces, and the creation of connected networks of space which link people with nature from their doorsteps, across their neighbourhoods and towns and to the countryside.

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4.5.5 In many of our towns the overall open space/green infrastructure network can be fragmented and where this is the case enhancing overall connectivity to green spaces and recreational amenities can be explored as a solution, for example through strengthening potential green corridors and enhancing permeability/active travel measures (See Case Study Example – Midleton, Appendix F). In general, the aim of developing an integrated network/hierarchy of multi-functional public open space/green infrastructure across settlements should be the key consideration. (See section (iv) public open space in SRD guidelines and also next section).

A Parks/Public Open Space Hierarchy (indicative)

4.5.6 As already highlighted the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines expect Development Plans to include a strategy for the provision of an integrated hierarchy of public open space (see earlier section Strategy for Public Open Space). Some Irish local authorities already include such hierarchies in their Development Plans. In order to align with National Guidelines this recreation and amenity policy proposes to set out an indicative hierarchy which can be considered when planning for parks and other public open spaces across the county from local to countywide level.

4.5.7 As area wide plans/strategies (settlement, municipal district, divisional level, etc) are being prepared and implemented such a hierarchy can be applied as considered appropriate. It will also be an aid to developers in preparing detailed planning applications (see also Part 5 Development Level Approach).

4.5.8 Application of the hierarchy should include multifunctional public open spaces and linked corridors that are accessible and provide for the recreational needs of the planned population, while also creating space for nature and ecosystem services. The following table 4.1 summarises the indicative hierarchy and accessibility standard proposed. (see also Appendix E which includes a broad description of the indicative functions of different levels within the hierarchy and some examples regarding scale). Achievement of accessibility standards will help to ensure that residents have better access to multi-functional public open space within walking distance of their home.

TABLE 4.1: PARKS AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACES: INDICATIVE HIERARCHY⁸ AND ACCESSIBILITY STANDARD⁹

Park Type	Size (hectares)	Accessibility standard
Pocket Parks/Smaller Amenity Spaces	400sqm to 0.2ha	c.100-200 meters of homes
Small Parks	0.2-2ha	c.400m
Local Parks	2-20ha	c.400-1km of homes
Urban Neighbourhood Parks	20-50ha	c.1km of homes
Regional Parks	50ha	c.5km of homes

4.5.9 Other parks (of varying scales) not set out in the indicative hierarchy above such as Heritage Parks, Country Parks, etc can also be considered. The need for Regional Parks may be considered within the context of the planned Metropolitan Cork Open Space, Recreation and Greenbelt Strategy (Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for Southern Region objective) or when planning at Divisional/Countywide level as appropriate.

⁸ This indicative standard is based on the South Dublin County hierarchy and standards. A similar standard was also used in the Water-Rock Framework Masterplan Study. Sizes and accessibility standards are similar in other local authorities but ranges sometimes differ particularly in relation to the larger parks.

⁹ Appendix E includes a broad description of the indicative functions of different levels within the hierarchy and some examples regarding scale

4.5.10 The Council recognizes the need to plan and provide for parks/strategic open spaces and will work to deliver these in partnership with stakeholders. A key consideration in the development of the hierarchy will be the provision of an overall well connected and permeable green infrastructure/public open space network which is accessible on foot or by bicycle.

4.6 ACTIVE RECREATION PROVISION

4.6.1 There are no current national standards for the provision of active recreational facilities, playing pitches, etc. While detailed quantitative population-linked standards for pitches, playgrounds, multi-use games areas, etc are often referenced in the UK (Fields in Trust UK standard) these tend to be not widely applied by local authorities in Ireland. The majority of active recreation across County Cork, including pitches, are provided either through clubs or schools.

4.6.2 The consideration of needs assessments/strategies outlined earlier should take into account views of local stakeholders and can consider the appropriateness or relevance of applying standards such as the Fields in Trust standard. Table 4.2 which follows sets out an example of some of the standards referenced in the Fields in Trust document *Guidance-for-Outdoor-Sport-and-Play-England.pdf* (fieldsintrust.org).

TABLE 4.2: FIELDS IN TRUST RECOMMENDED BENCHMARK GUIDELINES - FORMAL OUTDOOR SPACE

Typology	Quantity Guideline (hectares per 1,000 population)	Walking Guideline (distance from dwellings)
Playing Pitches	1.2 ha	1,200m
All Outdoor Sports	1.6 ha	1,200m
Equipped/Designated Play Areas	0.25 ha	100m - 1,000m
Other outdoor provision (MUGAs and skateboard parks)	0.30 ha	700m

4.6.3 The Council will continue to seek improvement in the range, quality and capacity of sporting and recreational facilities through initiatives in partnership with community groups and sporting organisations to cater for all age-groups and abilities. (See also objective GI 14-4 Recreation and Amenity Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028)

Co-location/Recreational Hubs

4.6.4 As National policy¹⁰ continues to encourage local authorities to promote and facilitate more sharing of facilities (particularly through funding bids) the Council will encourage the principle of co-location of amenities and shared use. Where possible sports and active open space amenities should be clustered or co-located in multi-functional recreation/community hubs at appropriate locations particularly in the larger settlements of the county. The provision of ancillary community facilities can also be considered. The scale will depend on the function of the settlement and the size of the catchment.

4.6.5 Active Recreation Hubs can provide one stop multifunctional recreation destinations. Co-location has the potential to provide play and recreational opportunities for a range of ages and abilities including facilities such as parks, swimming pools, playing pitches, skate parks, MUGAs (Multi Use Games Areas), teen spaces, playscapes etc within the same locality. (An example of a Recreational Hub is included on the next page)

¹⁰ National Sports Policy 2018-2027

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4.6.6 Ideally these should be located so that they facilitate ease of access with good connectivity to active travel infrastructure. Suitable sites and their indicative composition can be identified through the relevant town/area plan and appropriately justified by a needs assessment.

Co-location Example: The Mallow Castle (destination) playground is an example of how facilities can be co-located. Its provision is part of a larger project involving the upgrade of the castle itself, Mallow Town Park, the Spa House, etc and complements and supports the existing tourism offerings in the area at nearby Doneraile Park and Anne’s Grove House and Gardens. A skate park has also been recently completed in the Town Park as part of further investment in the area.

POLICY/ACTION – ACTIVE RECREATION PROVISION

Action	To assess provision of sporting facilities as part of studies/ audits carried out in advance of preparing area/ settlement level plans and to identify possible locations and mechanisms to address any deficits in sporting facility provision and to provide for future growth.
Policy	Promote the development of high-quality and multi-functional recreational facilities in appropriate locations throughout County Cork (co-location is encouraged), including Active Recreational Hubs, Multi-Use Games Areas and other community facilities to meet existing and future community needs.

Recreational Hub Example: (Ballymastone Recreational Hub, Fingal)



This planned multifunctional campus in Fingal will provide for an extensive range of sporting and recreational activities as a shared public facility; these include a floodlit 8 lane all-weather athletics track surrounding a grass soccer sized pitch, a full sized all-weather GAA pitch which also provides for 2 all-weather soccer pitches with flood lighting, a combined playground and skatepark, car/cycle parking, a 6 meter wide access road, extensive walking and cycling infrastructure, bleacher seating and extensive landscape planting. The development of the Recreational Hub at Ballymastone is an objective of the current Fingal County Development Plan. Substantial consultation was undertaken by the Council to ensure that the proposals significantly address the needs of local sporting clubs.

4.7 CHILDREN'S PLAY

Playgrounds

- 4.7.1** According to the most up to date records there are approximately 100 publicly available/ community playgrounds now in operation in Cork County which provides broad coverage across the 3 county divisions.
- 4.7.2** All main settlements and almost all designated key villages have access to playground infrastructure. A 5-10km catchment analysis carried out in 2019 indicated that the overall network of playgrounds already provides substantial coverage of the county. In some cases however there may still be opportunities to strengthen coverage.
- 4.7.3** The priority for playground provision into the future will be stronger alignment with population and the settlement network in order to maximise the number of people who will benefit from any future investment. Co-location will be an important consideration where this can be achieved (see previous section).

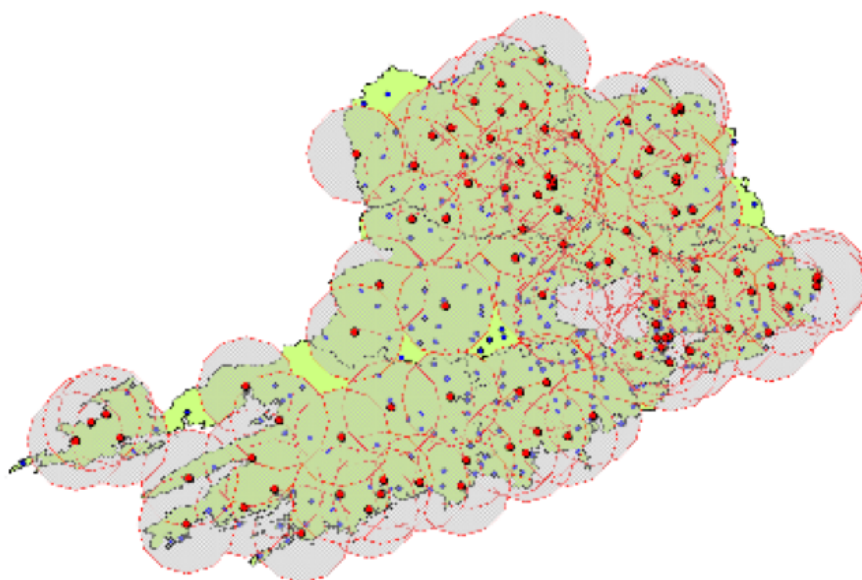


Fig 4.4 - 10km radius buffer map of playgrounds (blue dots are settlement network) (2019 data analysis)

- 4.7.4** By aligning provision close to population centres, potential usage of such facilities in these locations can be maximised and sustained. Having a high level more strategic network of playgrounds in established/growth locations also is more practical from a maintenance/ management perspective. By supporting Active Travel modes it can also potentially facilitate users who may wish to access the playground on foot, by bike or by using public transport whilst also providing for the needs of those who visit playgrounds using the car.
- 4.7.5** Considering broader opportunities there is scope to enhance the play experience in the County by delivering a limited number of more refined play facilities such as destination/flagship playgrounds. Although local playgrounds tend to have the greatest appeal due to their close proximity to the surrounding population, destination playgrounds may draw users from a wider area for their unique themes and offerings to a wide range of children and adults alike (e.g. Mallow Castle playground).

POLICY/ACTION – PLAYGROUNDS/PLAY SPACES

Policy	Support upgrade and strengthening of the existing network of playgrounds where there is appropriate justification and in line with any refurbishment and improvement programme that may be prepared. Consideration may also be given to alternative forms of play infrastructure (see next section Playful Places).
Policy (settlement network)	<p>Main Towns - Look to strengthen playground infrastructure in main towns across the county particularly those in which there may be current/future deficits and particularly where growth is planned.</p> <p>Villages - At key village/village level to cater for existing deficiencies where justified.</p> <p>In those villages and rural areas where the population is particularly low or there are other playgrounds within a reasonable catchment, other alternative amenity infrastructure should be considered which may have more widespread appeal such as walking routes, natural/passive recreation areas, etc.</p>
Policy	Tourism - To give consideration to supporting playgrounds in important tourist locations where a need is appropriately demonstrated in recognition that playgrounds can be an important tourist attractor.
Policy	Consider the potential for destination/flagship playgrounds in locations across the County where a need is appropriately demonstrated.
Policy	In decision making on the location of new playgrounds or investment in existing playgrounds to consider the policies outlined in this section as well as the criteria for location of a playground as set out in Appendix C of this policy.



Fig 4.5– Mallow Castle playground

Playful places

4.7.6 It is understood that play significantly impacts children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development while also laying a strong foundation for learning. One of the main objectives of the National Children’s Play policy (2004-2008) was to ensure that children’s play needs would be met through the development of a child-friendly environment and that the range of public play opportunities available to children would be maximised. This objective remains relevant and this Draft Policy is open to supporting new, innovative and unique play projects other than playgrounds including natural play areas in recognition that informal play is as important as formal play. Opportunities also exist to promote and enhance our towns and villages as family/child friendly environments incorporating the concept of play in both a formal and informal manner into public realm/placemaking. (See also section on Children’s Play in Part 5 Development Level Approach)

POLICY/ACTION – CHILDRENS PLAY

Policy	To support the provision of natural open spaces and opportunities for children and young people within the county to play and socialise
Policy	To promote a built environment that is child friendly and accessible to children.
Action	Give consideration to the preparation of a specific play policy for the County including specific playground standards/guidelines.



Fig 4.6 – Rain Playground (Gothenberg) Source: Goteborg.com

4.8 TEEN SPACE

4.8.1 It is recognised that needs and trends change and evolve and alternative play infrastructure should also be considered in line with the play policy outlined and particularly for different age groups (see previous section). The National Recreation Policy for Young People (2007) identified the importance of providing for the needs of young people in being active participants in the local community. The Council will aim to promote and deliver additional recreation and amenity facilities for children and teenagers in all major towns and villages. The Council will adopt an imaginative approach to considering proposals.

POLICY/ACTION – TEEN SPACE

Policy	To ensure that the needs of children and teenagers are adequately considered when planning for the recreational needs of communities across the County
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4.9 ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

- 4.9.1** Accessibility for all/universal design should be a key consideration in relation to the provision of recreational facilities across the County. The Council will give consideration to the preparation of Accessibility Audits where necessary and aim to carry out upgrades to existing amenities where resources allow.

POLICY/ACTION – ACCESSIBILITY FOR ALL

Policy	To ensure that accessibility-for-all is a key consideration in site selection and project design processes for all open space and recreational facilities.
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4.10 OTHER RECREATION/RURAL

- 4.10.1** In addition to formal parks and more formal outdoor recreation areas, it is recognised that the countryside itself is a very valuable and important resource which continues to be widely used by both urban and rural dwellers for recreation purposes. Many recreational attractions are set outside of the urban areas and often associated with the natural landscape. The countryside and coastline of County Cork is a key natural asset and countryside recreation is an important component of modern living and has a valuable social, economic, health and educational role to play in modern society. Cork County Council recognises the considerable recreational potential which is available in the rural environment of County Cork and its wider role in terms of rural diversification and supporting the rural economy.
- 4.10.2** Cork County Council will continue to support countryside recreation where it forms part of rural diversification opportunities and takes into account national policies such as the National Countryside Recreation Strategy and the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy.
- 4.10.3** Policy guidance/specific standards in relation to other amenities may be developed over the lifetime of the policy as appropriate or where necessary subject to resources.

4.11 PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING AMENITIES

- 4.11.1** Many settlements within the County already have important recreation and amenity facilities the protection and enhancement of which is an objective of the County Development Plan. (See also objective GI 14-5 Recreation and Amenity Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028)
- 4.11.2** Cork County Council will continue to investigate ways to improve the quality and capacity of existing facilities where feasible and appropriate and aiming for best practice national/international standards. This could include working towards achieving recognized standards such as the Green Flag Accreditation for parks and other community spaces (See appendix D).

POLICY/ACTION – ENHANCEMENT OF FACILITIES

Policy	The Council will (where feasible) support the enhancement of existing facilities to encourage their better use through improved accessibility and capacity.
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4.12 IMPLEMENTATION/RESOURCING AND FUNDING

4.12.1 Recent decades of growth in population have had demand implications for open space and play facilities, particularly for young children and teenagers. Having regard to the high level of development experienced and to the projected population growth envisaged over the coming years (see core strategy of Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028) it is recommended that resourcing will require significant attention over the coming years particularly if the aspirations, policies and actions outlined in this policy are to be achieved.

Organisational structures

4.12.2 Currently the provision and maintenance of recreation and amenity facilities is the responsibility of a range of different sections and Directorates in the Council. The provision of additional parks and other significant amenities into the future may necessitate the consideration of a revised organizational structure to include a dedicated Parks Department. This need to consider the establishment of such a department was previously highlighted in the 2006 Recreation and Amenity Policy. Larger parks are already envisaged and provided for in zoning plans for areas such as Carrigtwohill, Midleton (Water-Rock), Carrigaline, etc and delivery of these and other amenities will require careful planning.

4.12.3 Establishing a dedicated Parks Department has the potential to add value to all aspects of recreation, amenity, biodiversity considerations, etc and in the medium to longer term to assist in the preparation of new strategies and policies such as Parks Strategy, Tree Strategy, Play Strategies, Greening Strategies, Biodiversity plans, etc.

4.12.4 In the meantime, strengthened and formal co-ordination of the function across the Municipal Districts along with other relevant sections may be appropriate.

Funding

4.12.5 If more parks and recreation amenities are to be provided in the County as envisaged by this policy then mechanisms for delivering the lands and equipment needed will have to be considered including the use of development contributions (general or special) for other lands benefitting from the provision, the use of rates collected in the area etc. Such funds should be ringfenced for strategic recreation and amenity where possible. The expected upcoming review of the Development Contribution Scheme can give more detailed consideration to opportunities to enhance funding for amenities at the local level.

4.12.6 Significant and new funding streams such as the URDF/RRDF (Urban Regeneration Development Fund/Rural Regeneration Development Fund) have also been made available in recent years which fund projects supporting the objectives of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2027.

4.12.7 Types of proposals eligible for funding from a recreation and amenity perspective include:

- Public amenity, planting, streetscape/public realm, parks, recreational facilities,
- Infrastructure that enables improved accessibility, in particular sustainable modes such as walking and cycling, public transport and multi-modal interchange, but also including roads, bridges and car parking
- Transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society

4.12.8 The National Audit project (being led by Sport Ireland) is also expected to shape the funding landscape over the coming years (see also reference in earlier section Strategic Planning for Recreational Needs).

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4.12.9 Multiple sources of funding will continue to need to be investigated and pursued in order to adequately deliver recreational facilities across the County.

POLICY/ACTION – RESOURCING AND FUNDING	
Action	To consider identification and allocation of appropriate additional resources to the provision of Parks and other Recreational Amenities.
Action	To ensure the review of the Cork County Council’s Development Contribution Scheme takes into account considerations identified in this policy and that the financial implications of designing, procuring, delivering and managing parks and other recreational amenities are considered in devising the scheme.
Action	To establish a mechanism within Cork County Council for identifying appropriate funding streams at European, national and local levels which are available towards the provision of public open space, recreation facilities and related infrastructure and to co-ordinate same. In addition, to examine and explore other alternative funding mechanisms as appropriate.

PART 5

Development Level Approach - Public (Amenity) Open Space



PART 5

5.1 INTRODUCTION

- 5.1.1** The purpose of this Development Management approach is to set out appropriate guidance standards and a checklist in relation to the provision of amenity space/green infrastructure at development level.
- 5.1.2** When planning for public open space it is important to think of the function of that space, its purpose, the variety of uses that the space could accommodate and how it can contribute to the needs of current or future residents of the community as part of an overall healthy placemaking approach.
- 5.1.3** There is also a need to take into account the Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements (2024) which outline Development and Open Space Standards for Housing. These guidelines advise that the design and placemaking process and decisions made at each stage should be detailed in an Urban Design Statement submitted in support of a planning application to detail the thought process behind a scheme. Collaboration between the various stakeholders throughout the design process, particularly in larger developments, will be central to the delivery of successful schemes.

5.2 KEY COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022 DOCUMENTS

- 5.2.1** The Cork County Development Plan 2022 requires that a number of key documents are provided with planning applications which inform design considerations in relation to development level public amenity space. The following summarises the relevant documents:

TABLE 5.1: SUMMARY OF KEY DOCUMENTS/STATEMENTS INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENT LEVEL PROVISION OF PUBLIC AMENITY SPACE/GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE (CORK COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022)¹¹

Required Document	Requirement/notes
Green Infrastructure Statement/Landscape Design Rationale (LDR) ¹²	A requirement for a Green Infrastructure Statement (including a Landscaping Plan) and/or Landscape Design Rationale for larger developments (Objective GI 14-3)
Design Statement ¹³	Should be prepared for all medium-to-large scale and complex developments. Expected to have due regard to policy objectives and Placemaking Design Standards Checklist (paragraph 3.10.2 including planning application form requirement)
Drainage Impact Assessment	A Drainage Impact Assessment including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) proposals are required as part of Objective WM-11-10. Additional guidance is set out in the surface water management advice note
Permeability Statement	A statement of How Enhanced and Inclusive Permeability will be achieved to include a statement of compliance with DMURS (See Objective TM-12-2c)

¹¹ Further detail on these documents is included in Appendix B

¹² See also Appendix C of the Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements (2024)

¹³ A suggested threshold for Urban Design Statements/Architectural Design Reports of 50 residential units/5000 sqm of mixed development is set out in the Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements (2024).

The Green Infrastructure Statement and the Design Process (all development types)

- 5.2.2** A requirement of the 2022 Development Plan is that all developments submit a Green Infrastructure (GI) Statement (Objective GI 14-3). For larger¹⁴ developments this will usually involve a more detailed and thorough site investigation and exploration of design concepts setting out the multifunctional application of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI). In such developments the GI statement requirement can be integrated into and informed by a Landscape Design Rationale/Report (LDR) the outcome of which is the Landscape/Green (and Blue) Infrastructure Plan. For larger schemes in particular the input of design professionals with the appropriate skillsets is vital (see paragraph 3.9.8 of the County Development Plan 2022).
- 5.2.3** An important purpose of the LDR is to ensure that design and the potential benefits of multifunctional GBI including recreational needs (see paragraph 14.4.9 Chapter 14 of the Cork County Development Plan 2022) are considered at the very earliest stages of the process. The LDR should aim to address comprehensively the standards and checklist set out later in this overall section. It should complement and can form part of the overall Design Statement requirement (see section 3.10 of 2022 Plan). (A brief explanation of the GI statement and LDR and their typical composition are set out in Appendix B of this document)

5.3 PUBLIC (AMENITY) OPEN SPACE

- 5.3.1** In residential schemes public amenity/open spaces generally account for a substantial component of site level green infrastructure. The majority of this green infrastructure should be provided as multifunctional space, easily accessible to all, encouraging active and passive use for persons of all abilities regardless of mobility and/or age.
- 5.3.2** The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024) note that there is a need to focus on the overall quality, amenity value and biodiversity value of public open spaces and that public open space should form an integral part of the design and provide a connected hierarchy of spaces, with suitable landscape features, including seating and provision for children's play. It should also protect existing natural features and green and blue infrastructure corridors as well as focus on the conservation, restoration and enhancement of biodiversity.
- 5.3.3** The delivery of open (amenity) space as part of a development should not be seen simply as providing an area free of development. The more effective the design and the greater the increased functionality that can be offered as part of that design, the more reason there will be for people to use the space – and the greater the holistic benefit that can be realised. A successful scheme should be informed by a collaborative process involving all the various design, planning and engineering professionals.
- 5.3.4** There are 3 key elements/standards which have been identified in this policy which need to be considered in the effective provision of public amenity/open space in new developments. These are quantity, accessibility, and quality.
- 5.3.5** Addressing these (in combination with addressing the questions as set out in the checklist that follows) is likely to be indicative of a well-considered high-quality scheme with the potential to deliver multiple benefits to communities.

¹⁴ A recommended threshold for a LDR of 30+ residential units is specified in the Development Plan and the SRD Guidelines 2024 whilst the recommended threshold for mixed use development in the SRD Guidelines is indicated as 3,000sqm.

5.4 QUANTITY STANDARDS

- 5.4.1** Policy and Objective 5.1 (Public Open Space) of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024) now requires that Development Plans provide for a public open space requirement of not less than a minimum of 10% of net site area and not more than a minimum of 15% of net site area save in exceptional circumstances.
- 5.4.2** Prepared prior to the Guidelines the current Cork County Development Plan 2022 requires that public open space should generally make up at least 12% to 18% of a housing development but provides for this to be reduced to 10% in 'exceptional circumstances' where there is a high standard of private open space and where public open space is designed to a very high-quality standard. Objective GI14-6 of the 2022 Plan states that public open space within residential developments shall be provided in accordance with standards contained in the Interim Recreation and Amenity Policy (2019) and any successor policy as well as the 2009 Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (now replaced by the 2024 guidelines).
- 5.4.3** As the 2024 SRD guidelines are a direct replacement of the 2009 guidelines the public open space standards as set out in Policy and Objective 5.1 of these guidelines are now applicable. Public open space requirements (within the 10-15% range) should be justified to the satisfaction of the planning authority taking into account existing public open space provision in the area and broader nature conservation and environmental considerations. The guidelines allow for different minimum requirements to be set for different areas however the provision of specific requirements in this regard is beyond the scope of this draft policy and may be further considered in future masterplans/development plans, etc.
- 5.4.4** For sites that contain significant heritage, landscape or recreational features and sites that have specific nature conservation requirements, a higher proportion of public open space may need to be retained and the 10-15% range shall not apply to developments in such areas.
- 5.4.5** In assessing compliance with quantity standards consideration should also be given to section on Qualitative Standards below which sets out some guidelines as to what should be included in the open space calculation.

Relaxation of quantity standards

- 5.4.6** The 2022 Development Plan provides for a relaxation of standards from the site level quantitative approach where residential developments are close to the facilities of town centres or in proximity to public parks or coastal and other natural amenities. Similarly in small-scale low-density developments or in infill developments where it is not possible to provide a suitable quantity of quality public open space it may not be required to be provided on site. The Council may require a special development contribution to provide facilities in close proximity to the development in lieu of on-site open space provision (see paragraphs 14.5.12 and 14.5.13 of the 2022 Plan).
- 5.4.7** Policy and Objective 5.1 of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024) also recognise that it may be appropriate in certain instances to offset the public open space requirement and to seek a financial contribution towards provision of new public open space or enhancement of existing public space/amenities in the area e.g. not feasible due to site constraints or other factors to locate all of the open space on site, or the needs of the population would be better served by provision of a new park or enhancement of existing public space/amenity. The guidelines recommended that a provision to this effect is included within the Development Plan to allow for flexibility and state that in such circumstances, the planning authority may seek a financial contribution within the terms of Section 48 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) in lieu of provision. The 2022 Plan already includes a

provision for special contributions and Appendix G of this draft policy sets out more details on circumstances where the Council may consider a relaxation of standards and/or requirement for a special development contribution.

POLICY/ACTION - PUBLIC OPEN SPACE QUANTITY STANDARDS – RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Policy	Public Open Space quantity standards shall be applied which are in accordance with Policy and Objective 5.1 of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines (2024).
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5.5 ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS AND INDICATIVE HIERARCHY

- 5.5.1** The following are the guidance and standards in relation to accessibility. The key aim of the approach should be to achieve a high level of equity in accessibility amongst the population to a hierarchy of parks/open space within an area/settlement. (For additional detail see Section Parks and Public Open Space Hierarchy (indicative) in Part 4 and Appendix E)
- 5.5.2** For all developments with a residential component a variety of types and sizes of public amenity space should be provided where achievable. The larger the scale of development the greater the requirement there will be for the provision of a broader range of public open space amenities to serve the resident population. Developers will be required to demonstrate how the provision of public open space applies the hierarchy as set out in Table 5.2 whilst taking into consideration other existing and planned amenity space provision in the area. Where developments are larger in size the grouping of open space provision into larger, multi-purpose, informally supervised parks can be more appropriate than a scatter of smaller amenity spaces.

TABLE 5.2: INDICATIVE HIERARCHY AND ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC OPEN SPACE¹⁵

Type	Area (hectares)	Accessibility target standard/note
Pocket Parks/local amenity spaces Applicable scale: 5 units and above	400 sqm to 0.2ha.	Within 100-200 metres walking distance of homes Smaller amenity spaces which are most accessible from homes. Important in particular for smaller children/older persons.
Small Parks/larger amenity spaces Applicable scale: 30 units and above	0.2 – 2ha.	Within 400 metres walking distance of homes Larger amenity spaces which can be particularly important for the establishment of large canopy trees close to where people live. Multifunctional uses
Local Parks Applicable scale: Large developments (including those where masterplanning is necessary), area or settlement plans as appropriate.	2 – 20 hectares	c.400-1km walking distance of homes Multifunctional in nature. Depending on the size these parks can have a range of functions and may be more intensively used for sports and recreation purposes.

¹⁵ A broad description of the indicative functions of different levels within the hierarchy and some examples regarding scale are included in Appendix E

Children's play and other recreation

- 5.5.3** Play areas for children and teenagers can greatly enhance quality of life and sense of community. Play is not just about the provision of facilities but is about creating the conditions to facilitate play. The 2024 Guidelines recognise that public open space should be designed to cater for a range of active and passive recreational needs including play. Developers should adopt an imaginative approach to delivering play spaces at all scales. Developments should provide 'scale appropriate' natural children's play areas in semi-private or public open spaces. Play areas should be integrated into the overall design concept (Landscape Design Rationale) and include landscaping and natural features e.g. logs, mounding, boulders, and sensory planting, sculptural elements, etc. Play features should be centrally located so that they are accessible and supervised, without causing nuisance to nearby residents. Where natural landscape such as woodland is in proximity to the play space, this ecology should be incorporated and play opportunities dispersed throughout the available space as appropriate. The detailed design of the street can also create conditions for children's play closer to the home and which are integrated into amenity space (See also reference to DMURS in Appendix B).
- 5.5.4** It should be noted that Children's play standards are already in place for communal amenity space within apartment schemes (Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments 2022). Student accommodation, housing for older persons and one-bedroom units should generally be excluded from the requirements in relation to children's play.
- 5.5.5** The development proposed should demonstrate how the recreational needs of different age groups/users been taken into account. In larger developments where larger amenity spaces/parks are being provided 'teen space' should also be given consideration as part of the overall recreation provision (see also section on Teen Space in part 4)
- 5.5.6** Equipped play areas (not always with moving parts) may be considered in larger developments where small or local parks are being provided subject to agreement with Cork County Council. The types of facilities to be provided will be dependent on factors such as the size of a particular development proposed and the general availability of facilities (if any) in the area.

5.6 QUALITATIVE STANDARDS

- 5.6.1** Open spaces should be designed to a high specification. A strong emphasis should be placed on the quality and long-term sustainability of open space. Amenities should be designed to allow natural surveillance from nearby dwellings with safe and accessible routes for users to come and go. The following represents the minimum standards that should apply in relation to public amenity space provision:
- Public open space should be provided in accordance with policy set out in Section 5.4 Quantity Standards and as set out in Table 5.2 above.
 - Pocket parks/local amenity spaces (400 sqm to 0.2ha) available to the residential community should be provided for all residential developments of 5 units and above.
 - Developments in excess of 30 units should aim to provide at a minimum one amenity space of at least 0.2ha in size (See also details in Appendix E – Hierarchy regarding small parks/larger amenity spaces). This is based on the important role of amenity space for the establishment of large canopy trees close to where people live. Trees can play various roles in the urban environment such as providing shade, regulating temperature, enhancing biodiversity and placemaking)

- Open spaces should be designed so as to complement the residential layout and be overlooked and informally supervised by residents.
- The majority of public open space provision must be able to function as an area for active amenities and should therefore be flat in nature and capable of allowing for informal kick-about games, noting that natural play areas would require grading for play purposes.
- The bulk of open space should be usable. While narrow strips of land (<10 metres wide) can function as important green connections and improve levels of passive amenity within a development, they should not be included in the overall public open space calculation of a site.
- Areas generally not counted in the Open Space calculation on residential development layouts include:
 - Ancillary open space such as grass verges by roads, on edges of the site or corners in irregular site boundaries (where they do not form part of an interconnected network)
 - Green corridors (where they do not form part of an interconnected network)
 - Areas of open space where the presence of archaeology prohibits the development of the required play provision
 - Areas of open space under high voltage electricity lines and wayleave areas
 - Areas of excessive slope

5.6.2 In addition, the provision of high-quality public amenity space is critical not only for passive and active recreation but as a multifunctional asset and placemaking tool which also needs to consider the following:

- Retaining and enhancing natural heritage (net gain) and contributing to strengthening green infrastructure networks in a time of biodiversity crisis and climate emergency. (see also Development Plan guidance document 'Biodiversity and the Planning Process')
- Contributing to climate resilience where such spaces can help to offset the effects of extreme weather events by integrating nature-based solutions to reduce flood risk.
- Integrating routes which link neighbourhoods; increasing the overall accessibility and connectivity of public open space and assisting in the creation of a network of sustainable movement routes within a settlement and promoting active travel. (Note: Permeability and accessibility is essential as part of an integrated approach to the provision of linked open spaces. Where pedestrian and cycleway opportunities are presented, substantial links between developments will be encouraged. Where developments adjoin each other, suitably overlooked links through amalgamating the open space should also be provided.) (See also p41 of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Growth Guidelines 2024 and Permeability Statement in Appendix B of the policy)
- Incorporate place making principles and a high level of specification in the design and layout of all public open space (see also Appendix B re. Landscape Design Rationale/ Design Statement)

Management of High-Quality Open Space

- 5.6.3** Concerns of maintenance costs and risk management need not preclude varied and interesting design if the issues are considered from the outset and adequate measures put in place at planning stage. Consideration may need to be given to the need to set up management companies in instances where the development is of such a standard as to require more sustained and longer-term landscape maintenance. A high-quality design can be attractive to residents and improved residential values may offset maintenance costs if these are controlled.
- 5.6.4** In the main however, public open space should be designed to a standard which will not be subject to excessive maintenance and suitable for taking in charge in accordance with the most up to date Taking in Charge policy of Cork County Council (policy currently under review).

5.7 DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST FOR PUBLIC (AMENITY) OPEN SPACE

- 5.7.1** The best amenity spaces are those which function on multiple levels (see also Part 1 – Value of Public Open Space). In order to deliver successful developments/amenity space designers should address the questions/checklist set out in the following section along with the relevant standards in the previous section. These should be addressed within the Landscape Design Rationale/Green Infrastructure Statement required as part of the proposed development. This checklist can also be considered complementary to the Design Checklist set out in Appendix D of the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines (2024). It has a specific focus on public amenity space considerations to be taken into account in the preparation of development proposals however many of the questions are also equally applicable and can be taken into account where the local authority is involved in the provision of pocket parks/civic spaces and more strategic spaces such as parks, etc.

Accessibility:

1. Does the development meet the requirements of Table 5.2 - hierarchy and accessibility standards?
2. Are suitably proportioned and scaled amenity areas proposed and accessible to the majority of residents?
3. Has the layout considered how it can provide convenient access to nature and greenspace/recreational space in close proximity to the home?
4. Does the layout of the development including amenity areas integrate permeable and well-delineated pedestrian/cycle connections to access public open space/community amenities both within the site itself and within neighbouring sites? (See also reference to permeability statement/DMURS in Appendix B)
5. Are amenity routes and public spaces legible and designed to be inviting and safe?

Network Creation:

6. Are amenity areas/green infrastructure integrated and laid out coherently (in accordance with a hierarchy) and does the development facilitate connections/linkages both within the site and to more strategic green infrastructure within the settlement (physical and/or ecological corridors/connections)?

7. Has the design considered how greenspace/the public space network at the smallest scale can link effectively with the wider green infrastructure network at the more strategic scale – from doorstep to countryside? (Note: Though most settlements will not have the benefit of detailed green infrastructure plans, developers should consider opportunities to strengthen the green infrastructure network and address this within the design of the scheme)

Quantity:

8. Does the development provide the right quantity and proportion of quality public open space? (see in particular earlier section in Part 5 on Quantity/Accessibility standards)
9. Has the development considered the need to retain an additional quantum of public open space where appropriate? (This may be applicable on certain sites containing significant heritage, landscape or recreational features and sites that have specific nature conservation requirements) (see Policy and Objective 5.1 - Public Open Space in the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlement Guidelines 2024)

Health and Wellbeing:

10. Does the development optimise movement for sustainable modes i.e. promote connectivity, active travel and healthier lifestyles? (Note: this could include elements such as amenity walks/jogging routes, trails and linear parks) (See also reference to permeability statement/DMURS in Appendix B)
11. Does the development provide opportunity areas for passive reflection in addition to more active spaces?
12. For larger developments are there a range of public, communal and/or private amenity spaces and facilities for children of different ages, parents and older people? How have the recreational needs of different age groups/users been taken into account? (See also earlier section in Part 5 (Accessibility Standards) including Children's Play)
13. Are amenity spaces provided in a format that is multifunctional and flexible (providing for year-round activity) and for the needs of a range of users (user centred design)? Note: This should take into account the function of other spaces in the network.
14. Are the uses that attract the most people suitably located in the most accessible places?
15. Are amenity areas universally accessible and inclusive (designed to cater for a range of active and passive recreational uses) and have they considered how they can be designed to promote positive mental health?
16. Does the development provide opportunities for social connectivity, enjoyment and creating a sense of belonging and identity within the community?
17. Has the development considered opportunities for community involvement in amenity space such as providing a place for positive social interactions e.g. food growing, multifunctional event space, etc?
18. Is open space generally well overlooked providing adequate natural surveillance? Are children's play areas (where provided) suitably overlooked and contributing to the amenities of the neighbourhood? (See also earlier sections from part 5 on Accessibility Standards, Table 5.2, note on Children's Play and also Appendix E)
19. Are amenity spaces aligned to make best use of sunlight, thereby encouraging residents to use outside spaces?

Sustainable/Adaptable:

20. Do the proposals respond positively to natural features and contribute to nature enhancement and the creation of an environmentally positive place?
- has there been an adequate ecological appraisal of the site?
 - is the overall development protecting, and where possible enhancing, the built and natural heritage? (See also documents required in Appendix B)
 - are there possible ecosystem services which can be delivered by the proposed development and have these been identified? (Note: Ecosystem services provided through various types of green and blue infrastructure are the direct and indirect contributions/benefits of ecosystems to human well-being. (For additional information see also chapter 14 Cork County Development Plan 2022)
 - has the development maximised the potential for urban greening/biodiversity enhancement (net gain) etc? (See also documents required in Appendix B)
 - is the development incorporating and integrating nature-based biodiversity positive solutions into the overall landscape design?
 - is the sustainable management of water evident in the proposed development and how is it contributing to amenity and biodiversity? (A Drainage Impact Assessment including Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) proposals are required as part of the 2022 Cork County Development Plan - see Appendix B)
 - is the overall development integrating climate considerations into the design and planning of public open space incorporating adaptive measures such as providing shade to alleviate heat stress, supporting urban biodiversity/ecology, water retention and flood alleviation?

Placemaking:

21. Has a landscape and visual impact assessment been provided where necessary?
22. Does the overall design concept/urban design strategy proposed provide for a strong sense of place including areas of distinction and character? Has the proposal responded positively to natural features and landscape character?
23. Has the overall public realm including streets been considered as a usable integrated element in the design of the development?
24. Do the proposals constitute a durable well considered design with high quality landscaping and finishing materials throughout the public realm and amenity areas? (Note: This may include linked footpaths (walkability), age friendly seating (ideally maintenance free), appropriate lighting, landscaping, tree planting, etc)
25. Has the future management and care of green spaces and infrastructure been adequately considered and are proposals set out in this regard? (Note: A Landscape Management Plan is generally required as part of the Landscape Design Rationale (LDR) proposals. See also Appendix B)
26. Is the safety and amenity of future residents safeguarded to a reasonable extent?

5.8 AMENITY/LANDSCAPE CONSIDERATIONS FOR NON-RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

- 5.8.1** Many of the questions set out in this section will also be applicable to other types of non-residential/mixed development and it may be useful to consider these when preparing the required Green Infrastructure Statement including Landscape Design Rationale and Landscape/Green (and Blue) Infrastructure Plan. (See also paragraph 14.4.7 and 14.4.8 of Cork County Development Plan 2022 and Appendix B of this document)
- 5.8.2** The priority considerations in such locations will be the following:
- Enhancement of the GBI network and connectivity
 - Contribution to health and wellbeing
 - Environmental Sustainability
 - Contribution to placemaking

Appendices



APPENDIX A - LIST OF RELEVANT CORK COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2022 OBJECTIVES (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

Note: Aside from the objectives listed below the plan has been prepared based on the principles of sustainability, climate action, biodiversity, social inclusion, placemaking and resilience (see chapter 1 of Cork County Development Plan 2022). These principles are threaded through the plan content as well as forming the basis of many other individual objectives.

PL 3-1: Building Design, Movement and Quality of the Public Realm
PL 3-3: Delivering Quality and Inclusive Places
SC 6-9: Cork an Age Friendly County
WM 11-1: EU Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan
WM 11-2: Surface Water Protection
WM 11-10: Surface Water, SuDS and Water Sensitive Urban Design
Flood Resilient Design: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WM 11-13: Flood plains and Wetlands - WM 11-14: Strategic Flood Risk Management - WM 11-15: Flood Risk Assessments"
TM 12-1: Integration of Land Use and Transport
TM12-2 Active Travel
GI 14-1: Countywide Green and Blue Infrastructure Objectives
GI 14-2: Green Infrastructure Objectives for Main Towns and Settlements
GI 14-3: Green Infrastructure and Development
GI 14-4: Recreation and Amenity
GI 14-5: Replacement/Redevelopment of Leisure and Recreational Facilities
GI 14-6: Public/Private Open Space Provision
GI 14-7: Countryside Recreation
BE 15-1: Support and Comply with National Biodiversity Protection Policies
BE 15-2: Protect sites, habitats and species
BE 15-6: Biodiversity and New Development
BE 15-8: Trees and Woodlands
HE 16-2: Protection of Archaeological Sites and Monuments
HE 16-14: Record of Protected Structures
CA17-2: Climate Change

APPENDIX B - KEY DOCUMENTS/STATEMENTS INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENT LEVEL PROVISION OF PUBLIC AMENITY SPACE/GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Cork County Development Plan 2022 requires that a range of documents are provided as part of development proposals. The following is a summary of some key documents of importance/relevance to be considered which influence the design and layout of greenspace/amenity areas for developments.

Green Infrastructure (GI) Statement

Objective GI 14-3 Green Infrastructure and New Development requires all development to submit a Green Infrastructure (GI) statement.

For small scale development the GI statement should include a landscape plan (see Objective HE 16-21 Design and Landscaping of New Buildings), consider the potential for biodiversity enhancement (net gain), consider opportunities for the overall enhancement of the Green and Blue Infrastructure network through the connection of green spaces and ecological corridors, consider opportunities for sustainable water management and climate resilient design, etc.

For larger developments the GI statement requirement can be integrated into the overall Landscape Design Rationale (LDR)¹⁶ the outcome of which is the Landscape/Green (and Blue) Infrastructure Plan. Within the LDR more detailed and thorough site investigation and exploration of design concepts setting out the multifunctional application of Green and Blue Infrastructure is likely to be required. A Landscape Design Rationale can form part of and sit within the overall broader Design Statement.

Typical Documents included in the LDR are:

- Ecological appraisal¹⁷ (Surveys of ecology of the site as necessary)
- Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment
- The Landscape/Green and Blue Infrastructure Design Concept
- Landscape/Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan
- Landscape Sections/Boundary Treatments
- Maintenance/Management Details

Design Statement

Paragraph 3.10.2 of Chapter 3 Settlements and Placemaking (Cork County Development Plan 2022) indicates that Design Statements should be prepared for all medium-to-large scale and complex developments and should have due regard to policy objectives and the Placemaking Design Standards Checklist in the Plan. The Design Statement should address urban design, landscape and building design issues and clearly explain the development process, the design options considered and the rationale behind the adopted development strategy. A recommended threshold for Urban Design Statements/ Architectural Design Reports of 50 residential units/5000 sqm of mixed development is set out in the Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements (2024). The Guidelines state that the design and placemaking process and decisions made at each stage should be detailed in an urban design statement submitted in support of a planning application to detail the thought process behind a scheme.

¹⁶ Applicable thresholds for LDR's are set out in the Cork County Development Plan 2022 and Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Growth Guidelines. See also Part 5 Development Level Approach.

¹⁷ Of note in terms of the Ecological appraisal is the Development Plan guidance document 'Biodiversity and the Planning Process' which is due for update shortly.

Drainage Impact Assessment

Chapter 11 Water Management of the County Development Plan 2022 (Objective WM-11-10) requires that a Drainage Impact Assessment (to include Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)) is provided. Additional and detailed information is set out in the Surface Water Management Advice Note which accompanies the Development Plan. The Advice Note highlights that the Drainage Impact Assessment should provide for integration of SuDS into green spaces and demonstrate how the 4 pillars of SuDS (Water Quantity, Water Quality, Amenity and Biodiversity) are achieved. It supports the integration of this with the Green Infrastructure Statement where relevant.

The advice note also includes a SuDS selection hierarchy sheet which identifies some of the source control solutions that can be considered in developing SuDS proposals.

Permeability Statement

Chapter 12 Transport and Mobility of the Cork County Development Plan 2022 (Objective TM-12-2) requires a statement of How Enhanced and Inclusive Permeability will be achieved to include a statement of compliance with DMURS (Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets).

This statement relates to the overall permeability of the development and its ability to facilitate walking and cycling.

APPENDIX C - CRITERIA FOR THE LOCATION OF A PLAYGROUND

The following primary criteria will be used to assist in identifying the best locations for future playground development within the parameters outlined:

- Areas with highest youth population
- Areas with greatest proportion of youth per head of population
- Areas with no infrastructure or where current infrastructure is inadequate in context of its location
- Proximity of the centre in question to another centre with an existing playground/significant amenity asset.
- Existence of a suitable community structure to deliver the project and manage same
- Level of readiness of the application (ownership/permissions/licenses etc.)
- Prominent sites that are easily accessible to everyone (by public transport where possible), allow supervision, adequate lighting, a well-used and visible area, sufficient car parking spaces, access for emergency vehicles.

Secondary criteria:

- Existence within a Clár area
- Level of deprivation
- Ability of the centre in question to cater for other Local Service Centres which do not have access to a playground facility

APPENDIX D - GREEN FLAG CHECKLIST

The Green Flag is a recognised international qualitative benchmark standard for parks and other public spaces. For information purposes the checklist criteria used in relation to assessment of the standard is set out below. (See also section on Placemaking in Part 3 of this Draft Policy) For more information consult following link [green-flag-award-guidelines.pdf \(greenflagaward.org\)](https://www.greenflagaward.org/green-flag-award-guidelines.pdf)

Field Assessment

A welcoming Place	Score	Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage	Score
1. Welcome 2. Good and Safe Access 3. Signage 4. Equal Access for All		19. Management of Natural Features, Wild Fauna and Flora 20. Conservation of Landscape Features 21. Conservation of Buildings and Structures	
Healthy Safe and Secure	Score	Community Involvement	Score
5. Appropriate Level of Quality Facilities and Activities 6. Safe Equipment and Facilities 7. Personal Security 8. Control of Dogs/Dog Fouling		22. Community Involvement in Management and Development 23. Appropriate Provision for the Community	
Well Maintained and Clean	Score	Marketing and Communication	Score
9. Litter and Waste Management 10. Horticultural Maintenance 11. Arboricultural Maintenance 12. Building and Infrastructure Maintenance 13. Equipment Maintenance		24. Marketing and Promotion 25. Appropriate Information Channels 26. Appropriate Educational and Interpretational Information	
Environmental Management	Score	Management	Score
14. Managing Environmental Impact 15. Waste Minimisation 16. Chemical Use 17. Peat Use 18. Climate Change Adaption Strategies		27. Implementation of Management Plan	
Total			

APPENDIX E - PARKS AND PUBLIC OPEN SPACE (INDICATIVE HIERARCHY) - OUTLINE OF TYPES

Type: Pocket parks/local amenity spaces

At the residential level these are smaller amenity spaces which are most accessible from homes. Spaces at this scale can also function as civic spaces/squares in more central/compact urban settings. They provide informal play/recreation activities usually for smaller children and also have a visual and social function. Being close to the home such spaces should consider the needs of children up to the age of 6, though they may be used by older children at different times of the day or evening. They may also provide an important location for older persons to interact, to meet, exercise, and relax. Smaller open spaces can serve as stepping stones within the wider green infrastructure network.



Typical size:
400sqm to 0.2ha

Accessibility standard:
100-200 metres of homes

Example of scale/type:
Seven Oaks, Frankfield (0.2ha)

Type: Small parks/larger amenity spaces

These are small parks/larger amenity spaces which include more multifunctional uses. Developments in excess of 30 units should aim to provide a minimum of one amenity space of at least 0.2 hectares in size. This minimum size threshold is based on the need to provide sufficient area to accommodate informal recreation and play as well as tree planting, earth-mounding and park furniture where appropriate. Having amenity space at this scale can be particularly important for the establishment of large canopy trees close to where people live. Sites which have a larger area may be multi-functional and allow for a wider range of facilities and uses i.e. equipped play (where appropriate and subject to agreement with the Council), kick about areas and passive recreation. (See also part 5 Development Level Approach) In terms of play these are largely intended for use by children up to the age of 12. These spaces may also have a nature conservation/biodiversity role, particularly in the preservation of trees and other important features.



Typical size (hectares):
0.2ha to 2 hectares

Accessibility standard:
c.400 metres of homes

Example of scale/type:
Ballinwillin, Mitchelstown
(0.7ha)

Type: Local Park

Depending on the size these parks can have a range of functions and may be more intensively used for sports and recreation purposes. They are largely multifunctional in nature. They have the potential to accommodate a wide range of uses including playing pitches, teenage space (see Part 4 Teen Space), passive recreation and biodiversity areas. The larger ones, which may have more of a settlement level function may be suitable for consideration for the location of active/recreation or community hubs. (See Part 4 – Active Recreation)



Typical size (hectares):
2ha to 20ha

Accessibility standard:
c.400m-1km from homes

Example of type/scale:
Charleville Park
c. 7ha local/town park

Including park, pitches (x2),
MUGA, playground, pitch and
putt, biodiversity area, etc.

Type: Neighbourhood Park

Neighbourhood Parks generally range in size from approximately 20 to 50ha (occasionally up to 100ha) in size. They can contain a wide variety of facilities and uses which may include playing pitches and changing rooms relating to outdoor facilities and activities, play facilities, outdoor gyms, walking and cycling routes.

Neighbourhood parks have the potential to incorporate a range of green infrastructure features, such as marshlands, meadow parklands, community gardens and informal biodiversity rich planting areas.



Typical size (hectares):
20 to 50ha

Accessibility standard:
c1km from homes

Example of type:
Mallow Town Park and surrounds c.10ha to c.50ha of parklands

Part of a larger emerging park network. Range of functions similar to a neighbourhood park with potential to function at regional scale.

Type: Regional Park

These large public parks vary between 50 to 200ha in size, generally serving areas within a 5km radius, but also catering for users across the County and as a destination for tourists. Generally, they contain natural heritage, built heritage or cultural features and visitor facilities. Activities may include formal and informal children's play areas, walkways and cycleways, seating and passive recreation areas, playing pitches (including all-weather pitches) and changing rooms, running tracks and allotments. They should be easily accessed by public transport and cycling, with adequate provision of bicycle and car parking.

Typical size (hectares): 50ha +

Accessibility standard: c. 5km from homes

Example of type: Regional Park Ballincollig c. 55 hectares

Facilities include open grassland, pitches, woodland, playground & Multi Use games areas. A skate park and outdoor fitness equipment.



APPENDIX F - CASE STUDY EXAMPLE - MIDLETON - RETROFITTING THE GREEN NETWORK (THROUGH PLACEMAKING, ACTIVE TRAVEL AND PERMEABILITY ENHANCEMENTS)

Though there may exist parks/green space deficits within our settlements there are opportunities in many towns to realise the Green and Blue Infrastructure network vision by retrofitting, enhancing connections and identifying other amenity opportunities. Midleton is an example of how a high-level area-based assessment of green space (in parallel with other plans/studies) informed the County Development Plan and identified opportunities for connectivity and permeability through engagement with the transport section, etc.

The map and visuals which follow show that where investment in active travel infrastructure to connect places is made and enhancement of existing spaces (through placemaking) is prioritized and funded the overall open space/Green and Blue Infrastructure network can be strengthened considerably.

The Owenacurra River and Dungourney Rivers are key linear corridors which are being linked through investment to other amenities including the Town Park (recently upgraded) and Ballyannan Woods. Into the future they will be linked to new amenities such as the Water-Rock Linear Park and the Midleton to Youghal Greenway to the north of the town.



Figure 6.1 – Map demonstrating connections which are in place, in progress and planned into the future linking green infrastructure elements such as parks, riverside amenity, woodland and greenway.



Figure 6.2 – Town Park upgrade (Midleton)



Figure 6.3 – Town Park upgrade (Midleton)



Figure 6.4 – Enhanced connectivity/permeability at Midleton town park

APPENDIX G - APPLICATION OF CONTRIBUTIONS IN LIEU

See also part 5 Section on Quantity Standards. The following are instances where the council may consider a relaxation of standards and/or requirement for a special development contribution (see also 14.5.14 of Cork County Development Plan 2022):

- Where residential developments are close to the facilities of town centres or in proximity to public parks or coastal and other natural amenities
- In small scale low density developments or in developments where providing such an amount is not possible such as infill developments e.g. where it is considered prudent for architectural or normal planning considerations not to provide it on-site for example a streetscape infill development.
- Where due to site shape, topography or general layout open space provided within a development may not adequately fulfil a useful purpose (Note: Compliance with quantitative and qualitative standards as set out in section Public Amenity Space Standards and Checklist will be assessed)
- Where other justifiable factors or circumstances indicate that the needs of residents would be better served by provision of a new park or enhancement of existing public space/amenity (at the discretion of the planning authority)

APPENDIX H - VISUALS

The following represent a sample of some elements (where highlighted) that could be considered in the provision of high-quality public amenity space.



Fig 6.5 Harpers Creek, Glounthaune - Path/exercise route, seating and biodiversity



Fig 6.6 Harpers Creek, Glounthaune – Greenspace serving multifunctional purpose (service vehicle access)



Fig 6.7 Roscam, Galway - Amenity walk route



Fig 6.8 Roscam, Galway - Sculpture and play



Fig 6.9 Réileán, Galway - Path leading to cycle route



Fig 6.10 Réileán, Galway - High quality shared surface complementing amenity space



Fig 6.11 Doughiska, Galway - Park level amenity including playground



Fig 6.12 Ballyburke, Galway - Play area using some natural materials



Fig 6.13 Maoilín, Galway - High quality landscape design



Fig 6.14 Maoilín, Galway - High quality landscape design



Fig 6.15 Leargan, Galway - Housing fronting onto smaller amenity space



Fig 6.16 Portmarnock - Public open space combining role as amenity space and active travel corridor



Fig 6.17 Portmarnock - Public open space combining role as amenity space and active travel corridor



Fig 6.18 Natural surveillance of public open space – Source: Secure by Design Guide (2023 – UK)



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