

Chapter 3

Objectives and Methodology

3.1 Objectives of the Strategy

3.1.1 The objectives of the Strategy are:

- To ensure public open space provision in the county is sustainable and contributes to the wider planning and development vision for the county
- To address any deficiencies in the provision of public open space across the county and to ensure that all communities have equal access to a range of formal and informal spaces for recreation sport and play
- To improve the quality standards of parks and open spaces
- To provide a clear rationale for future financial investment in parks and open spaces, through the provision of a comprehensive evidence base
- To facilitate wider community involvement in the improvement and management of the county's parks and open space provision
- To establish standards for parks and open spaces that will help inform policy in terms of Quantity, Quality and Accessibility

3.2 What is Included

3.2.1 The Open Space Strategy focuses on public open spaces that are publicly and freely accessible. As such, it covers all public parks, open spaces in housing estates, sites that provide access to nature and facilities for outdoor sports, recreation and play (see also Glossary of Terms). The following were excluded:

- roadside and motorway verges
- private gardens
- allotments
- agricultural lands
- private cemeteries and burial grounds
- beaches

3.2.2 School grounds *per se* are also excluded, except in consideration of outdoor recreational facilities where they are available to the community.

3.2.3 State-owned lands, particularly those in the uplands are not included in the quality and quantity assessment strands of the strategy. However, they are included in the Geographic Information System (G.I.S)⁴, to provide a broader view of open space provision. The mapping therefore includes woodlands at Barnaslingan, Carrickgallogan, Kilmashogue and Tibbradden.

3.2.4 In practice it can be difficult to determine whether a site, for example Airfield Farm, Dundrum needs to be included or not. However, the Council recognises the contribution of all open spaces to the county's green infrastructure, for the many benefits they bring, including biodiversity, climate change mitigation, leisure, education and amenity.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 The Strategy has been developed broadly in accordance with the Companion Guide to the UK Planning Policy Guidance note 17 (PPG17) 'Assessing Needs and Opportunities' (2002). This requires the setting of standards of provision for parks and other types of open space. It also requires that, when setting standards, local authorities audit the current levels of provision and assess the needs of local people in terms of future provision. The methodology has therefore involved the following steps:

The development of an open space working group of internal stakeholders

- A lengthy public consultation stage
- A review of existing strategies, policies and corporate information that influence the provision of open space or recreational facilities
- A digital mapping assessment that identified the range of provision by its specific type or purpose. This has been developed into a G.I.S dataset.

⁴ An integrated mapping system which captures, stores, manages and analyses data that is linked to geographic location. The Strategy used MapInfo™ G.I.S software to assess the county's open spaces and outdoor sports and recreation facilities.

- The dataset has enabled an analysis of quantitative, qualitative and accessibility standards of provision at electoral and county levels.

3.3.2 DLR appointed consultants, Strategic Leisure Ltd., to carry out the audit and assessment for the Strategy, and to advise on the technical aspects of the GIS analysis.

3.4 Audit and Digital Mapping

3.4.1 The audit involved an assessment of quantity, quality and accessibility:

- Quantity - to identify each open space by type and to develop a local typology that defines what type of space it is, what is its primary purpose and to quantify it.
- Quality - what is the current physical condition of each site and its infrastructure.
- Accessibility - is space available to meet local needs; how proximate is it to local residents. Which neighbourhoods are not adequately served and what is an acceptable distance for local people to travel, measured 'as the crow flies'

3.4.2 A key stage of the Strategy was the collation of descriptive and spatial data on the county's infrastructure of open spaces and outdoor recreational facilities and playgrounds. Existing data was reviewed and updated and then integrated for use in a new G.I.S that will assist the Council in its future management of these assets.

3.4.3 A sample of 400 open spaces is included in this study; only spaces that are equal and greater than 0.2 hectares (2,000 sq. metres) were included. This minimum size threshold - the size of a mini-soccer pitch - was recommended by the consultants, Strategic Leisure as it is typically used by

U.K planning authorities in deciding on the scope of audits.⁵ The 400 sites were examined in the quantitative and accessibility strands of the Strategy's audit and assessment.

3.4.4 For the audit of outdoor recreational facilities the Strategy used the Field's in Trust's definition, "...space that is accessible and available to the general public, and of a suitable size and nature, for sport, active recreation and play." Sports facilities in public, private and voluntary ownership were included in a preliminary assessment of public accessibility.

3.5 Assessing Open Space Quantity

3.5.1 For this Strategy, a typology and hierarchy was devised, based on the Parks management team's collective experience of open space provision in the county over many years. The typology and hierarchy is unique to this strategy and supports the local circumstances of this county. DLR's current provision of open space and outdoor recreational facilities has been classified into 3 types (Table 3.1): Parks, Open Spaces and Outdoor Recreational facilities. Within the Parks and Open Spaces an associated hierarchy reflects the heritage value, civic importance and primary purpose of each level from Flagship Parks down to the Amenity Open Spaces provided in new residential areas. Many of the Parks contain recreational and play facilities, although some playing pitches are self-contained sites.

3.5.2 The assessment and subsequent analysis of provision has been undertaken on a countywide and electoral area basis. The analysis and standards allows DLR to benchmark and to make informed decisions about the supply and demand of provision across the county.

⁵ See Chapter 5, PPG 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation. Companion Guide. May 2006. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London, U.K.

Table 3.1 Open Space Typology and Associated Hierarchy (Class 1 and Class 2 refers to the County Development Plan designations)

Type	Hierarchy	Definition
Parks (Class 1)	Flagship Parks	High profile, high quality parks with a range of visitor attractions, facilities, incl. toilets, tearooms, car parking, play areas and toilets. Theme gardens may also be a feature.
	Major Local Parks	Large parks which provide for a wide range of needs in a large number of neighbourhoods. Several of these parks are associated with river valleys.
	Local Parks	Smaller parks within easy walking distance, which provide for the needs for a number of local neighbourhoods
Open Space (Class 2)	Amenity Open Spaces	Spaces facilitating some informal active recreation, but mainly passive recreation and visual amenity; commonly, but not exclusively, associated with residential areas and housing estates
	Civic Open Spaces	Spaces mainly comprised of hard landscape features and materials, such as squares, plazas and outdoor malls and other hard-surfaced areas that are designed primarily for pedestrians but can include shared surfaces
Outdoor Sport and Recreation Facilities (These facilities may be stand alone provision or provided on sites within other typologies above)	Golf Courses	Public golf courses managed by DLR
	Grass Pitches	Sports pitches provided for Soccer, Rugby, Gaelic Sport and Cricket
	Synthetic Sport Pitches	Synthetic Sports pitches provided for field sports and for training purposes
	Tennis Courts and Bowling Greens	Facilities specifically provided for participation in Tennis or Bowls
	Playgrounds, Multiple-use Game Areas (MUGA's), Ball Courts/ Skate Parks	Specifically designed areas often within other types that provide opportunities for play and social interaction
Private Sports Grounds	not applicable	Sites owned and managed privately for sport that contribute to the overall open space provision, but are exclusively for club members and therefore not publicly available
Cemeteries and Burial Grounds	not applicable	Public and privately-owned (with public access) graveyards and burial spaces around places of worship

Note: Natural and semi-natural open space is a feature of most parks in the Parks typology; however, the % of land allocated to this purpose varies significantly depending on the role and context of the park. Amenity open space rarely contains natural and semi-natural open space.

3.6 Assessing Parks and Open Space Quality

3.6.1 A sample of 193 sites was assessed as part of the Quality Audit. This sample comprises the largest open spaces, including the five Flagship Parks, all Major Local Parks, all Local Parks and most of the Amenity Open Spaces.

3.6.2 In the absence of an Irish standard, the methodology of the U.K Green Flag Award scheme for auditing parks and open spaces was utilised.

3.6.3 The quality audit was undertaken between March and April 2009. The audit examined the range and quality of provision in the county's parks and open spaces, and was carried out by open space auditors who assessed the sites against best practice criteria. This considered the quality of the sites from a visitor's perspective in terms of how welcoming, well-maintained and safe sites were.

3.6.4 The results of the quality audit were analysed together with the findings of the public consultation (Chapters 4, 5). This combined analysis provided the basis to set standards of provision for each type of open space (Chapter 7).

3.7 Assessing Outdoor Recreational Facilities

3.7.1 The site audit assessed a sample of grass playing pitches, ball courts, MUGA's⁶ and playgrounds that were present on sites classified as Parks or Open Space.

⁶ A MUGA (Multiple-Use Games Area) is an active recreational facility that combines a number of sports and play modes, typically basketball and soccer, on a synthetic surface enclosed by robust, high quality fencing.

3.7.2 The assessment of grass pitches was a non-technical visual appraisal of the condition of a sample of pitches using best practice advocated in the development of robust playing pitch assessments.



Pitch drainage works at Balally Hill, Sandyford (July 2005)

3.7.3 The audit of fixed play provision considered the condition of the equipment, the age-range and the play value of the play areas and is derived from RoSPA's (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) play value assessment.

3.8 Assessing Parks and Open Space Accessibility

3.8.1 The public consultation was necessary to establish the local levels of use for each type of space. It also provided an opportunity for people to say whether provision meets their needs and to what extent it meets their aspirations. It helped identify those deterrents that may prevent people from using open spaces (see section 4.7).

3.8.2 For the purposes of this Strategy, **the term 'Accessibility' refers to the geographic proximity, by distance in metres ('as the crow flies'), of residents and communities to parks and open spaces.**

It is probably more correctly described as 'Proximity', as in "*.. the physical location of green space in relation to where people live, and how far people have to travel to access different types of green space.*"⁷

This definition is also in accordance with best practice methodology that is recommended in U.K guidance, principally [Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation](#) and [Planning Advice Note 'Planning and Open Space' PAN 65](#) (Scottish Executive, 2008).

Unfortunately there is no parallel guidance, in any guise, is available from the Irish Department of Environment or any other department or state agency.

3.8.2 It is important to note that the term is separate from the concept and methodology that arises from **the meaning of ease of access for people with disabilities**. In an Irish context such an alternative connotation is derived from the requirements of the Disability Act, 2005 and the National Disability Strategy 2009 -2015. However, for the purposes of this Strategy and in keeping with the concept and practice of Universal Design **ease of access** is captured using qualitative criteria within the **Quality audit strand** of the Strategy (see Appendix C: Quality Audit).

⁷ See C.A.B.E's (UK) 2010 publication: 'Urban green nation: Building the evidence base'. page 7



Walled garden at Marlay Park, Rathfarnham