

## **2.1 Overview of Dún Laoghaire -Rathdown**

### 2.1.1 Location

Dún Laoghaire – Rathdown County (DLR) is the smallest county Council in the State, extending to 126 square kilometres; with its administrative centre of Dún Laoghaire situated just 10 kilometres south of Dublin City.

The east of the county is defined by a 17 kilometre stretch of coastline, including harbours, cliffs and beaches with varying degrees of accessibility. The northern and eastern quadrants of the county are dense urban suburbs. The south and west of the county is comprised of agricultural lands and rural uplands within which there are publicly-accessible forests.

### 2.1.2 Historic Context

The parks and open spaces of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown are the legacy of two distinct periods in the development of the county. In the 18th century the sea bathing and scenery to be enjoyed along the coastal villages south of Dublin were seen as highly desirable escapes for the more affluent residents of Dublin city; particularly given the difficult housing, employment and health conditions which prevailed at that time in the city. By the early 19th century Dún Laoghaire was the fourth largest urban centre in Ireland. The transfer of the steam packet service to Dún Laoghaire in 1826 and the commuter railway in 1834, further contributed to the development of Dún Laoghaire and the coastal villages extending from Blackrock to Dalkey. As a consequence public parks were provided at Crosthwaithe Park (1860's) Blackrock Park (c. 1883), Killiney Hill (1887) and The People's Park (1890).

By 1936 there were 27.5 hectares (68 acres) of public open space in the Borough of Dún Laoghaire, including Blackrock Park, Marine Gardens,

People's Park, Beach Gardens (East Pier), Salthill Gardens, Coliemore Park and Sorrento Park. Dalkey Hill and quarry were purchased to enlarge the Killiney Hill Park.



View of east pier and gardens c.1936

From the 1970's up to recent times there was a significant increase in the population of Dublin and also the transfer by the former Dublin Corporation of residents from the city to new suburban estates in what was then the administrative area of Dublin County Council. This migration did not impact directly on the area now administered by Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. However, it did contribute to an expansion of suburban housing and as a consequence a number of significant parks were also created, most notably Marlay Demesne, Deerpark and Cabinteely Park.

In the 21st. century the changing role of the Harbour and its related public realm as a leisure area is a relatively new dynamic for Dún Laoghaire town centre. Another trend - the rapid suburbanisation of what and densification of

some older and new districts bring pressures on existing open spaces and parks, changing the form and nature of open space planning. Apartments developments were a particular feature of the noughties, often constructed as infill developments on the grounds of large demesne houses. Careful treatment of the remnants of these properties is evident in how open space and mature trees have been retained and designed.

During the late 1990's and early 2000's the pace of development accelerated particularly with the opening of M50 extension and the related high density residential and industrial expansion in Sandyford/Leopardstown, Stepside and Carrickmines. Changes in density policy density are evident - from 3.3 units to over 100 per hectare being permitted today. While quantitative criteria for open are still important the emphasis has shifted to quality. Employment moved from industrial to smart economy requiring different type of setting and amenities including open space.



Shanganagh Park (33.4 hectares) - a significant part of the greenbelt between Shankill and Bray [1980's-1990's]

The challenge posed by densification and loss of open spaces (e.g Dun Laoghaire Golf Club) to the provision of adequate and high quality parks and open space is significant. In the 1930's it was envisaged that Dublin county would have extensive greenbelts. Today, little remains of that strategic objective, except in areas such as Shankill / Woodbrook and Little Bray, where Kilbogget Park and Woodbrook Golf Course form an important break to the southern expansion of urbanisation.



Cabinteely Park (36.6 hectares) in low-density house district [1980-90's], next to Cabinteely Village and old Dublin Road to Bray

During recent times, hundreds of smaller Local Parks and parcels of environmental open space were provided within housing estates. These form an important part of the network of open spaces which residents and visitors to Dún Laoghaire Rathdown enjoy today.

The challenge today in planning terms, is for DLR is to assess and integrate the needs for open space preservation, recreation and leisure, biodiversity

and future provision of open space to the broader agenda of Green Infrastructure, as outlined in the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the Dublin Region.

In tracing the history of the development of County in his book 'Between the Mountains and the Sea', Peter Pearson (2007) concluded that: "*Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County is part of the great hinterland of Dublin city .....The county is undoubtedly a suburb, with its many residential areas, but it is also the playground and garden of the capital.*"

### 2.1.3 Demographic Profile

It is important to consider the demographic make up of the county as key demographic and socio-economic characteristics are known to influence demand characteristics. For example, certain age-groups are known to register higher participation rates in a number of sport and leisure activities; deprived communities often experience issues relating to access to services and opportunities; cultural backgrounds may result in some passive and active recreation pursuits being favoured over others; car ownership levels can impact on the range of facilities that can be accessed.

The population of the county in 2006 was 194,038 (Central Statistics Office Ireland Census Data). This figure was used for the purposes of the Strategy.

### 2.1.4 Household Composition

In 2006, there were 68,412 private households in the DLR area. In 1996 the average household size in DLR was 3.0. By 2006 it was 2.71. This is comparable with regional and national figures.

In 2006, there were 3,418 lone parents with children in DLR, where at least one child was under 15 years. This represents an 18% increase on the 1996 figure. There were 15,285 couples with children (under 15 yrs) in DLR in

2006 reflecting a reduction of 10% between 1996 and 2006. This is in contrast to the national picture, which showed an increase of 4% over the same period.

### 2.1.5 Employment

There were 158,794 persons aged fifteen or over in 2006; 55% of these people were in work, 14% were students, 13% of the population were retired, and 11% were looking after the home. Compared to the State and the Greater Dublin area, there were higher percentages of retired, students, and working individuals in DLR.

The largest employment / occupation group was managers and executives, with 11,035 residing in the county. The second largest group were clerical and office workers, closely followed by business and commerce workers, sales occupations, personal service and childcare workers.

In 2006, 5.4% of the working population of DLR were unemployed.

Unemployment rates in the county were significantly lower than those in the region (8.3%) or the State (8.5%). The unemployment rate in 2006 for males was 5.8%, and for females it was 4.9%. By the last quarter of 2010 the unemployment in the county had risen to 11.8% and 13.9% for the State.

### 2.1.6 Education and Social Profile

In DLR there is a comparatively higher percentage of the population with third level degrees. In 2006, 51% of the population had third level degrees, or higher qualifications, compared to 35% in the Greater Dublin Area and 30% in the State. Relative affluence is reflected in the percentage of the population that are professional workers (Social Class 1) compared to managerial and technical workers (Class 2). In 2006, 51% of the population were classified as Social Class 1 or 2, with 14% in Social Class 1 and 37% in Social Class 2. The highest concentrations of Social Class 1 and 2 in the

county were along the coastal areas of Killiney and Dalkey, Blackrock as well as parts of Dún Laoghaire, Foxrock and Mount Merrion. Despite DLR's relative affluence, there are pockets of deprivation in the county, primarily in the electoral districts of Dún Laoghaire-Sallynoggin West, Dún Laoghaire-Mounttown, Churchtown-Nutgrove and Dún Laoghaire-Monkstown Farm.

#### 2.1.7 Nationality

Approximately 88% of residents living in the DLR County are Irish, with the remainder of the population made up of a wide range of nationalities. The largest populations of foreign nationals in the county are from the U.K, Poland and the Philippines.

## **2.2 The Vision for Parks and Open Spaces**

*That residents and visitors will enjoy easy access to quality parks that draw on the unique heritage of the county and that serve a diversity of recreational opportunities.*

## **2.3 Benefits of Open Space**

2.3.1 Parks and open spaces are central to the delivery of sustainable and healthy communities. There is increasing evidence to show how local networks of high quality, well-managed, safe and welcoming parks and open spaces help to enhance the urban environment. Attractive spaces play a vital role in supporting community cohesion, and influencing where people choose to live, work and play.

2.3.2 Parks and open spaces are crucial to the quality of life for urban communities, as they provide the breathing space where people can get away from the rigours of everyday life, can relax, recreate or find peace of mind in tranquil settings. As such they are key components of Green Infrastructure, which provides ecosystem services of particular significance to urban dwellers.

2.3.3 Open spaces are the 'green lungs' of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, contributing to the quality of life, well-being and health of all who live, work and visit the county.



Wild Bluebells at woodland edge in Killiney Hill Park



Families and children enjoying the playground at Cabinteely Park

Open spaces are:

- Play Spaces: where children can safely explore and imagine, thereby stimulating their sensory development
- Breathing Spaces: oases of calm amidst the urban hustle and bustle of modern living - spaces to unwind and relax
- Healthy, Living Spaces: inviting places, encouraging us to get active, through access to the outdoor environment
- Meeting Spaces: communal places where people have time to converse; encouraging communities to come together
- Working spaces: active places where people want to live and work; providing quality environments for inward investment
- Learning spaces: stimulating places where the outdoors becomes a natural place for lifelong learning
- Wild spaces: informal places where nature is welcomed back into the urban areas; providing opportunities to see wildlife first hand

- Creative spaces: inspirational places encouraging creativity in an outdoor setting (e.g. arts events, busking, yoga etc.)
- Spaces for tourism: flagship and heritage parks, coastal sites
- Spaces for sustainable transport: Greenways, green streets
- Spaces that increase and sustain adjacent property values

2.3.4 Dún Laoghaire - Rathdown is comprised of a range of urban, semi-natural and rural landscapes, within which a network of public open spaces provide opportunities for leisure and recreation.

## **2.4 Strategic Context**

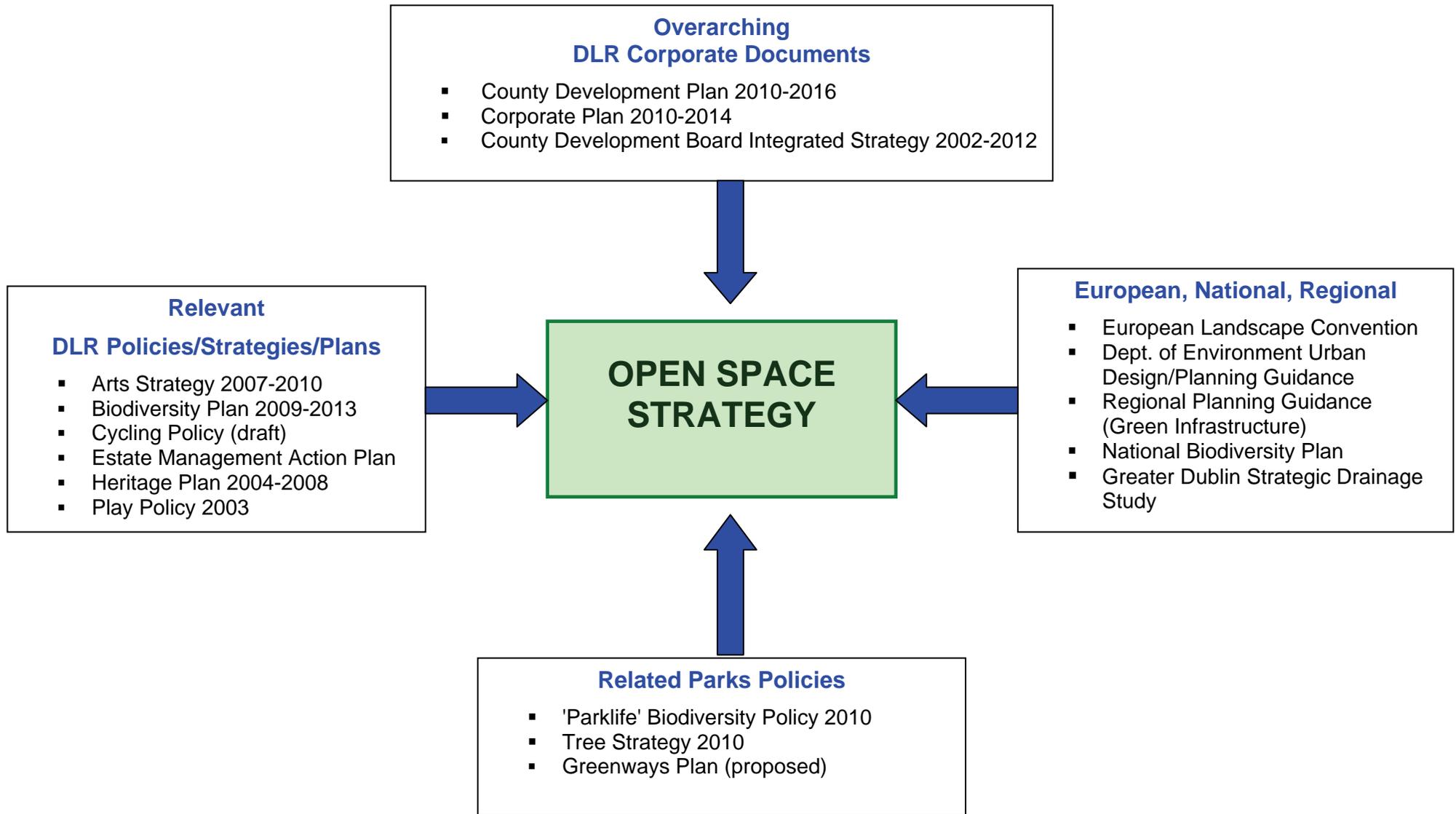
2.4.1 The Strategy takes account of a number of European, national, regional and local policies. These various policies have direct and indirect bearings on the planning, design and management of parks and open space. Figure 2.1 (next page) shows the contextual relationship of these multi-level policies and documents.

2.4.2 Ireland ratified the European Landscape Convention (ELC) in 2004. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) is currently preparing a National Landscape Strategy (NLS), in order to meet its obligation under the Convention, an international treaty to “*promote European landscape protection, management and planning.*”

2.4.3 The Convention defines landscape as: “... an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.” and “as a zone or area as perceived by local people or visitors, whose visual features and character are the result of the action of natural and/or cultural (that is, human) factors.”

**Fig. 2.1**

Contextual relationship of the Open Space Strategy relative to local, national and European policies





Manmade feature in a semi-natural landscape at Killiney Hill Park

2.4.4 The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 incorporates the ELC definition of landscape into Irish legislation for the first time. This definition reflects the idea that landscapes evolve through time, as a result of being acted upon by natural forces and human beings. It also emphasises that a landscape is understood as a whole entity, where its natural and cultural components are taken together, not separately.

2.4.5 This relationship between nature and culture is very much reflected in the parks in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, where elements of natural and built heritage are closely interwoven.

2.4.6 The evolution of open space policy in Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown has been influenced by several international and national standards. In the late 1908's - early 1990's the Department of Environment's national policy - 'A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Parks, Open Spaces and Outdoor Recreation Areas by Local Authorities (M.Lynch, 1987) shaped the old Dublin County Council and Dún Laoghaire Borough Council's development plan framework and parks departments' approach. At that time emphasis was placed on providing a hierarchy of spaces with prescriptive quantitative guidance standards.

More recently, emphasis has been re-balanced to focus on the quality and accessibility of provision. In this respect, the most influential documents are the U.K. Fields in Trust's document, 'Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play'; and the Irish Department of Environment's '*Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, Guidelines for Planning Authorities*'.

2.4.7 Best practice guidance advocates the formulation of locally-determined standards of provision of open space. Such standards should be based on needs that reflect local circumstances. This is the approach adopted in this Strategy.

2.4.8 The County Development Plan contains the following vision statement in respect of Landscape, Heritage and Biodiversity: "To establish and foster a 'Green Structure' in the county that ensures features of natural heritage are protected, important wildlife habitats are conserved, biodiversity is enhanced, the beauty of the landscape is enriched and maintained and passive and active recreational uses are accommodated in a sensitive manner"<sup>2</sup>

2.4.9 Paragraph 10.1 of the Development Plan recognises that,

<sup>2</sup> DLR county Development Plan 2010-2016, Chapter 9.

*“Open space and recreational facilities are central to the delivery of sustainable communities. Such opportunities should be readily accessible to all sectors and all age groups of the population. Good recreational facilities are fundamental in achieving a desirable quality of life and environment for existing and future residents, visitors and workers in the county.”*

2.4.10 The Plan also states that, “ Local networks of high quality, well-managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help to enhance urban environments and should be planned to be easily accessible to as wide a population as possible.”

2.4.11 The long-term value of quality open space and recreational facilities depends on coherent policies in the Development Plan, effective management and maintenance by the Council and strong community support.

2.4.12 The County Development Plan 2010-2016 provides the terms of reference for the Strategy. Policy OSR1 of the Plan commits DLR to undertaking *"a comprehensive audit of the existing and proposed open space provision" .....* and to prepare an all-encompassing Green Space Strategy<sup>3</sup> for the County."

The Plan states that the Strategy *"...will set out the future policy direction in relation to active recreation, play and outdoor sports facilities."*

The Strategy *"... will consider the open space resource in existing communities, how well the needs of communities are being met and identify any changes needed to improve access to quality open spaces. The Strategy*

<sup>3</sup> The title of the Strategy as "Open Space" is used to broaden and to reflect the inclusion of civic spaces, that is, spaces that are primarily comprised of hard landscape, such as plazas and promenades (e.g. East Pier, Dún Laoghaire).

will take account of the quality, community value and use of existing open space - not merely the quantum of provision."

2.4.13 The Development Plan states that in strategic terms, the overall objectives of DLR in relation to open space and recreation are:

- To provide networks of accessible, high quality open spaces and sport and recreational facilities, which meet the needs of residents and visitors; and are fit for purpose and sustainable.
- To protect established green areas and public open spaces.
- To protect and enhance recreational areas.
- To manage and maintain public parks to the highest standard
- To provide new parks and green spaces with proper facilities in new development areas.
- To develop and improve physical linkages and connections between the network of parks and public open spaces in the county.
- To ensure adequate access to recreational facilities for all.



Sport and informal play at Deerpark, Mount Merrion