



Combining active (woodland trails) and passive open space (picnicing facilities) in a natural setting



Active Open Space

2.9 Open Space and Public Amenity

2.9.1 Analysis – Open Space Amenity

The local authority recognises the importance of an adequate provision of attractive and conveniently located open space throughout the city and environs. Open spaces can provide a variety of functions, including active recreation³⁰, passive recreation,³¹ visual amenity (important landscape views), ecology (bird and wildlife habitat; biodiversity of plant species), drainage management (particularly stormwater control) and socio-economic needs (such as meeting places, and allotments). Existing open space within Sligo is made up of these elements, which are important in the consideration of the overall open space strategy for the area.

The total area of open space within Sligo Borough, which includes public open space in the ownership of the local authority, private sports grounds and open space over one acre or 0.4 hectares, excluding incidental open space in housing estates,³² is over 56 hectares.

Twenty seven areas, over 1 acre (0.404 hectare) in size, were assessed within the city and immediate environs, with specific regard to the following factors: the type of open space (active, passive, residential, playing fields, natural amenity), landscaping, existing facilities provided and the overall quality of the space. 31% of the open spaces examined accommodate active uses, while 69% relate to passive recreation.

2.9.1.1 Active Open Space

Considering all the active open space assessed, only 25% were found to be in good condition, 37% were in fair condition and 38% were in poor condition. The area to the north of the River Garvogue contains no public active amenity area over one acre in size.

Of the 8 spaces which were of good or fair condition, 5 provided seating areas, 4 provided changing rooms, and 2 provided bins. There is an overall lack in both the provision and quality of facilities within the different sporting grounds, with poor landscaping employed.

2.9.1.2 Passive Open Space

The existing passive amenity areas over 1 acre/0.404 ha were also examined in terms of their overall condition and appearance. Of the 18 areas assessed, only 1 was in good condition, 2 were in a fair condition and the remaining 15, which are dispersed around the city, were in poor condition.

The majority of existing passive open space is incidental to housing developments, with these spaces generally lacking in overall quality, particularly in relation to their layout and integration in the overall development, design, landscaping, existing facilities, and the degree of overlooking. Few links are developed between adjoining housing areas, or between open spaces within large housing developments. In relation to the quality of facilities provided, only 1 of the 18 passive open spaces provided seating, while none of the spaces provided bins. Only one space has a strong landscaping element, with the other areas lacking in this regard. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the improvement and enhancement of these areas in the future, to create attractive, safe and meaningful public amenities.

The underutilisation and underdevelopment of public open space within the city, both passive and active, can be attributed to a lack of facilities, poor design, inappropriate location, lack of overlooking and difficulty with regard to maintenance (including litter).

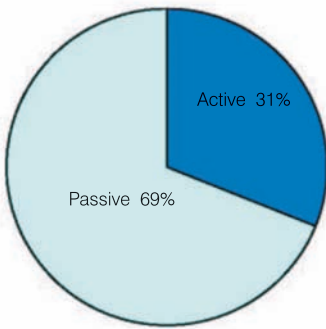
³⁰ Active recreation refers to active pursuits such as football, basketball, athletics etc.

³¹ Passive recreation refers to more passive activities such as strolling, dog walking and bird-watching.

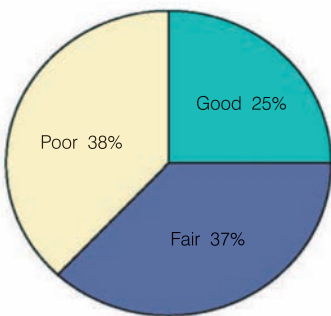
³² Public open space refers to open space in the ownership of the local authority, with access for all groups allowed. It therefore excludes lands belonging to institutions, for example religious or educational. For the purpose of this exercise, it also excludes natural woodland areas in public ownership. Incidental Open Space refers to small parcels of green open space with little or no landscaping, the function of which is limited. Sometimes they are 'left-over' areas of a development layout that have been seeded or grassed.

³³ The background for the preparation of this Open Space Strategy is the document 'Sligo Sports and Recreation Facilities and Action Strategy: A Framework for Action', (1998).

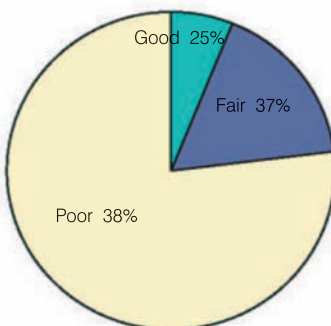
Percentage of Active and Passive Open Space



Condition of Active Open Space



Condition of Passive Open Space



Source: NBA Open Space Survey

Incidental spaces, should generally be limited in favour of more appropriately designed parks and playing fields, which could be more easily maintained. Private sports grounds are also lacking in facilities as a result of financial constraints. These issues need to be addressed in the determination of a quality network of open spaces, both active and passive, within Sligo City and Environs.

2.9.2 Open Space Strategy

It is the aim of the local authority to provide an interconnected system of quality parks, open spaces and outdoor recreation areas to enable a wide range of passive and recreational pursuits within easy reach of people’s living and working environment. This open space network seeks to integrate the following components into the proposed strategy, so as to provide ease of contact with nature:

- Key landscape elements - woodlands, significant tree groups, hill tops, etc.
- Sites of archaeological interest - raths, ringforts and other enclosures.
- The retention of stream corridors into a system of linear parks with associated storm water retention facilities that will provide ‘ponds in a parkland’.
- Linear parks incorporating waterfronts and shorelines.
- Sites for playing fields.

This Development Plan formalises ideas outlined in a previous framework plan and develops some new concepts³³.

A balanced mix of open space types within each area of the city needs to be developed to ensure ease of access for all to open spaces. There are ten principal areas proposed by the local authority as part of this open space strategy. These are supported by the inclusion of seven sites for playing fields, in addition to provisions for playgrounds, neighbourhood parks and urban spaces. These ensure that all existing and future areas of the city and environs are adequately served by a variety of open space types. It is a key objective to try and establish linkages and connections between these open spaces so as to provide a comprehensive network.

2.9.2.1 Strategy for the South East - Cleveragh, Doorly and Cairns - A Regional Park

A 220-acre Regional Park will be developed at Cleveragh Estate and Doorly Park. These lands have previously been developed to accommodate the Sligo Regional Sports Centre, which contains a swimming pool and sports and gym hall facility, with an associated all weather pitch. The Borough propose to develop within the regional park a range of playing fields with associated pavilions, a major children’s play area, tennis courts, high quality parkland and a wide range of passive recreational areas. A facility for accommodating circus, carnival and amusement events will also be facilitated.

Small sections of the wooded area at Doorly Park have been routed with walkways and trails, enhancing the passive amenity value of this land. It is proposed that an extensive additional network of walks and trails will be developed to enhance the recreational amenity of this wooded area. The masterplan for the area will group hard surface activities (i.e., buildings, basketball courts, etc.) together, separate from the soft surface development of the extensive natural woodland for passive recreational activities (playing fields and green areas). The Regional Park will also link in with the proposal for a linear park from Lough Gill, along the south shores of the Garvogue through the area, into the city and ultimately towards Gibraltar Point.

A short distance south of the proposed Regional Park at Cleveragh, is Cairns Hill. A woodland area with walking trails currently exists here and it is proposed to extend the area westwards to incorporate the visually prominent and sensitive lands in this area.



Playing field at Cleveragh Park, Sligo

2.9.2.2 Strategy for the West/South West - Kevinsfort-Ballydoogan

At Kevinsfort, 12 acres of public open space are currently being developed, involving the provision of one sand carpet soccer pitch, one sand carpet GAA pitch, a children's playground, teenager's multi-sports area and a walking/fitness track. The development of these lands will augment the existing private facilities at St.Mary's, the Merville pitch, and clubhouses, and also Sligo Rovers soccer pitch at the Showground.

2.9.2.3 Strategy for the North - Forthill

The development of a recreational park area is proposed at Forthill which will be 20 acres in size and include 2 full sized playing pitches, multi-sports areas for younger teenagers, a sports pavilion and visitors centre, and involve the enhancement of the existing fort for passive recreational purposes and tourism. Extensive quality parkland areas will be developed with a network of interconnecting pedestrian pathways.

2.9.2.4 Strategy for the (North) East - Rathquarter-Ballinode-Hazelwood-Farranacardy

A network of open spaces has been identified for the Hazelwood-Ballinode area in a Draft Local Area Plan. It seeks to protect the existing alluvial woodlands in the area, which have been identified as a candidate Special Area of Conservation. A broad linear park is proposed along its northern edge - providing a buffer between future development areas and the sensitive woodland areas - this will provide an east-west pedestrian and cycling route through the area. This park system is intended to be laid out to accommodate stormwater retention ponds so as to assist in regulating stormwater run-off from future developments and thereby regulate the natural hydrological characteristics of the alluvial woodland habitat and maintain the water quality of Lough Gill. These proposed areas will connect with a linear park system that will run along the north bank of the Garvogue River where it will link into the J. Fallon Footbridge at Riverside and ultimately to the waterfront path at Kempton Promenade. A cycle path and walkway are proposed along its length.



Garvogue River, Sligo

It is proposed that the hill top in the Rathquarter area (lying immediately south of the Ballinode Neighbourhood Centre) be maintained free from development, as it affords views of the city, the Garvogue River and Cleveragh. Likewise, the ridge-line at Farranacardy is also proposed as an area of open space for similar reasons. Other woodland belts and archaeological features are identified for incorporation of smaller elements of a linear park system, between the Calry Road and the Dromahair Road.

Playing fields in the area are proposed in proximity to a proposed neighbourhood centre at Hazelwood. Although the area is on the periphery of the city at present, it is expected that there will be further development to the east in subsequent development plan periods.

2.9.2.5 Strategy for the North - Shannon Oughter-Rathbraughan-Cartron-Standalone Point

The course of an existing stream runs from Doonally to Carton Bay, via Rathbraughan and Shannon Oughter. It is an important natural landscape feature in the north of the city. It is proposed to develop a linear park along its length, incorporating some features of archaeological interest and significant tree groups. As surrounding areas become developed, opportunities for stormwater retention facilities could be provided to act as ponds in a parkland setting. As a linear park it will provide an attractive 'green lung' for the area, establishing a link through the future urban area between countryside and sea.



Passive Open Space

Facilities for playing fields will be incorporated into the linear park system especially where it is wider and more expansive. Where the linear park reaches the sea, there is an area of wetlands which have been incorporated into the network for protection and bio-diversity. Adjoining the Bundoran Road are level areas that provide fine views towards Knocknarea. These are proposed for active open space (playing fields).

These open space elements are all interconnected and provide a link into the open space along the north shore of the Cartron Estate. It is also proposed to provide a continuous connection around the shore at Cartron, which will provide a link back to Markievicz Road. From here a continuation of the linear park network is proposed to run along the stream that runs along the north side of Duck Lane and Ash Lane, thus it establishes links to Forthill and the parks at Ballinode.

The development of a recreational park area is proposed at Standalone Point, which will be 25 acres in size and include 3 full sized playing fields, multi-sports areas for younger teenagers, a sports pavilion and visitors centre, and involve the enhancement of the existing foreshore areas for passive recreational purposes and tourism. Extensive quality parkland areas will be developed with a network of interconnecting pedestrian pathways and cycleways. This area will link back to the open space along the north shore of Cartron Estate.

2.9.2.6 Strategy for the West - Gibraltar-Cumeen-Finisklin

Gibraltar Point affords significant fine views across Sligo Harbour, with views towards Rosses Point and its offshore islands, in addition to fine views of Knocknarea and the intervening countryside. The shore lands at Gibraltar and Finisklin are visually sensitive as viewed from the Rosses Point Road. The bay, the shore and wetlands at Cummeen have been identified by Duchas - the Heritage Service - as Special Protection Areas. In order to safeguard these environmental assets, while providing a meaningful area of open space in this part of city, it is proposed to reserve an expansive linear park system with possible connections over time to the quays where urban waterfront spaces would be developed that could provide a connection back into the city centre.

2.9.2.7 Strategy for the South West - Maugheraboy/Caltragh

As the development strategy will see significant development in the south west of the city and environs, particularly in the vicinity of the Caltragh interchange (associated with the proposed Inner Relief Road), there is a need to ensure that there are adequate lands reserved for open space and amenity purposes in this area. A site for playing fields is reserved in the vicinity of the proposed neighbourhood centre near Caltragh to meet this purpose. Passive recreational needs are supported by a series of east-west linear parks that run through the area, with the intention of providing direct access to the countryside.

The linear park network includes a ridgeline that lies approximately halfway between Caltragh and Summerhill, a proposed linear park through Ballyfree and Oakfield, in addition to a reservation of land on the western side of the railway that could double as an infrastructure corridor and possible wildlife corridor.

2.9.2.8 Strategy for the South - Tullynagracken

The Borough recognises the need to acquire suitable lands to the south of the city to facilitate the growing population in this region. In addition to those lands at Caltragh (see section 2.7.7), there will be a need to provide additional lands to the south of the city. It is therefore proposed to provide open space at Tullynagracken, where over time future development is anticipated. The lands identified will provide a linear park from Carrowroe towards the Green Road/Cairns Road, with a central area reserved for playing fields.

2.9.2.9 Strategy for the Far South - Carrowroe to Belladrihid.

The development strategy highlighted the need to zone lands for 'land extensive uses,' such as vehicular sales, logistics and warehousing (section 1.5.2.6). Such uses will be encouraged on the wedge of land that lies between Carrowroe and Belladrihid, and is defined by the N4 to the west and the Old Dublin Road to the east. This is the most important approach route to Sligo and in order to ensure that a positive image of Sligo is presented, it is proposed to develop a landscape buffer to screen uses along the western edge of these lands. The lands will be required to be mounded and landscaped with a clearly delineated buffered landscaped edge - minimum 10 metres wide along the road edge. It will act as a wildlife corridor and an area of visual amenity as well as enhancing the existing scenic views.

2.9.2.10 Playing Fields

The above open space network provides seven key sites for active playing fields and sports grounds. Guidelines for the provision of such open space indicates that all new dwellings in urban areas should be within one kilometre of such facilities. The system, as proposed, will ensure that virtually all areas of the city and environs are served by a comprehensive network of playing fields.

Sligo Sports and Recreation Action Strategy identifies an action framework within which recreational needs for the existing and future population will be met. This programme specifies proposed developments at Cleveragh Estate and Doorly Park, Forthill Recreational Programme, and Kevinsfort Recreational Programme. The development of these three open space schemes will be the priority focus in the Development Plan.

Sligo has been designated as a Sports and Recreational Partnership under the Irish Sports Council's 'Era for Sports' programme, which enables greater opportunities for participation by all in sport, by ensuring that sports resources are co-ordinated at a local level. This will augment and enhance the work being carried out by volunteers in local clubs and communities. The Sports and Recreation Partnership committee for Sligo are at present involved in establishing an audit of current sports infrastructure; identifying the key issues in relation to participation, and developing strategic action initiatives to address the issues.

As the majority of existing clubs and sporting bodies do not have the required finances to develop their own facilities, the local authority will act in a strategic management role to facilitate the recreational development of their land in cooperation with various sporting agencies and funding sources. Public Private Partnerships will be considered in the development of the recreational lands. The Council will also facilitate a joint partnership role with school bodies so as to enable joint usage of existing sporting grounds within the area which are at the moment only open to school students within school times and are hence an under-utilised sporting resource.



Playground with good use of materials and colour

2.9.2.11 Playgrounds

There is currently only one active children's playground within Sligo located at Holborn Hill. Issues in relation to liability/insurance and potential for claims, vandalism and inadequate funding have in the past hindered the provision of such playground areas, however due to the obvious social need for such facilities this situation is changing. Sligo Borough Council is committed to developing play areas to the recognised safety standards, in the interests of promoting and encouraging children's social, physical, intellectual and creative development within a suitable recreational environment.



Urban Park

As it is not possible to provide supervised playgrounds with the appropriate European standard of equipment and supervision within each housing estate, it is intended to include playgrounds within the overall recreational/amenity strategies for open space, such as in the Kevinsfort recreational area, the Forthill Development and the Cleveragh Estate. It is intended to provide a large adventure playground within the Cleveragh Regional Park. The provision of skateboard facilities as part of this development will be considered.

Provisions of these three major sites for play areas are to be prioritised and as the other major park areas are developed playground facilities will be provided. A strategic development of major playground facilities will thus be provided in keeping with population expansion. All playgrounds provided or managed by the Borough Council will be built and maintained to comply with all relevant European Safety Standards. The system as proposed, will ensure that all areas of the city and environs are served by a comprehensive network of playgrounds.

Where possible additional smaller play areas associated with major housing estates will be developed as a second tier of local play areas. Within the document Sports and Recreation Facilities and Action Strategy in Sligo, the Borough Council have identified a number of sites within housing developments to be prioritised in their Play Parks Action Plan, namely Cartron Estate, Ballytivnan Estate, Cranmore Estate and Maugheraboy Estate. Children also tend to use other less formal open spaces for play, therefore developers will be expected to provide useful informal open spaces, such as pocket parks, within residential areas.

The local authority will secure a site for the development of an inner city playground amenity in addition to developing a related peace park theme over the period of the plan. These would serve as important focal sites and public amenities, which would be easily accessible to the population of Sligo and visitors alike. They could accommodate younger children and also those in their early teens, while also facilitating events such as open-air performances and the display of artwork.

2.9.2.12 Urban Parks and Squares

It is an aim of the plan to develop new urban spaces, of both hard and soft surfaces, within the city centre to act as focal points and to cater for a variety of activities, such as informal kickabout, sitting areas, open-air performances, venue for local festivals, display of art and market place activity. These urban parks and squares will be strategically located to provide a relaxing outdoor environment within the urban fabric, while also forming part of the open space network for the city and environs. A number of civic squares and a peace park are proposed within the city centre at Stephen Street Car Park, Quay Street Car Park and at the Wine Street-Adelaide Street junction (see City Centre section 2.2).

2.9.2.13 Local Neighbourhood Parks

Section 2.7 outlines a schedule of proposed neighbourhood centres. It is an objective of the local authority to ensure that a local park, civic square or village green is provided as an integral element in the design of all neighbourhood centres (see section 2.7 and 2.13.5).



Local Neighbourhood Park combining passive and active open space facilities

2.9.3 Policies for Open Space

It is the policy of the local authorities to:

- Encourage a balance in the location and types of open space provided within the city and environs and ensure the development of high quality open space areas, for both active and passive use, and formal and informal activities.
- Resist the loss of existing public or private open space, unless alternative recreational facilities are provided in a suitable location, or if it can be demonstrated that there is no longer sufficient demand to sustain the facility.
- Cater for the sporting/recreational needs of all sectors of the community (children, teenagers, adults, older adults, the disabled, the disadvantaged or marginalised) and promote the integration of those with special needs into the sporting and recreational environment.
- Work with disability groups to ensure that recreational and sporting facilities provided are user friendly.
- Facilitate the work of the Sligo Sports Partnership.
- Support the implementation of the County Development Board Document, particularly with regard to the section on Sporting and Recreational life.
- Encourage a Volunteer and Coach Training Programme, to enhance and increase the level of staff resources to develop and support sport and recreation activities.
- Support Public Private Partnership initiatives to enable the financing of various recreational programmes.
- Develop a partnership between schools, local sports clubs and the public in relation to the use of existing sporting grounds within school properties on evenings and weekends.
- Act in a leadership role to mediate between the range of sporting agencies, clubs, facilities and organisations in order to encourage a partnership involvement in providing broad ranging amenity and recreation programmes.
- Encourage local community involvement in the upgrading and improvement of open spaces.
- Facilitate the development of children's playgrounds in proximity to existing and proposed neighbourhood centres.
- Ensure that the provision of open space in developments is provided in a meaningful, integrated and coherent manner, and generally discourage piecemeal and incidental open spaces.
- Ensure that where an adequate provision of open space is not provided on site, that either the shortfall is provided as part of a larger open space scheme or that a development contribution is paid to the local authority so as to implement the proposed open space strategy for the area.
- Require the implementation of landscape plans for all proposed open spaces within residential areas, except where playing fields are being provided and do not require landscaping.
- Ensure developers make provisions for sports and recreational infrastructure commensurate with the needs of the development as an integral element of their proposals.
- Promote the development of pocket parks within large housing schemes.
- Promote recreational and sporting programmes to cater for young children.
- Provide improved facilities at formal active open spaces and facilitate the upgrading of sports grounds in club ownership, where possible.



2.9.4 Objectives

It is an objective of the local authorities to:

- OS1** Develop open space and recreational programmes for the lands at Kevinsfort, Forthill, Cleveragh and Doorly Park.

- OS2** Provide children's playgrounds at the following recreational parks:
 - Kevinsfort
 - Cleveragh
 - Forthill
 - Stephen's Street Park (in conjunction with proposals to remove car parking and provide a civic space with an open air market).
 - Other principal areas proposed as part of the open space strategy. (no map reference)

- OS3** Provide children's playgrounds within the following housing estates:
 - Cartron Estate,
 - Ballytivnan Estate,
 - Cranmore Estate and
 - Maugheraboy Estate

- OS4** Facilitate the accommodation of Circus, Carnival and Amusement events within the proposed Cleveragh Regional Park

- OS5** Develop the Cathedral Park as an Inner City Peace Park, maintaining the existing green character of this walled space, while facilitating use of the central area for purposes such as open-air performances.

- OS6** Redevelop the Markievicz Open Air Pool to cater for active and/or passive recreation.

- OS7** Develop a system of linear parks and waterfront amenity areas with walkways and cycleways, at the following locations:
 - Along the north bank and south bank of the Garvogue River, from Kempton Promenade to Hazelwood Demense (on the north side) and from J. Fallon Bridge to Cleveragh Park (on the south side).
 - From Hyde Bridge to Hughes Bridge and from there along Ballast Quay and Deep Water Quay to the proposed open space at Gibraltar.
 - Along the foreshore area of Cartron estate linking to Standalone Point Park.
 - Along the stream course north of Duck Lane, Ash Lane and from there to the Hazelwood-Ballinode amenity area.
 - Along the west side of the railway line from Tonafortes bridge to the proposed western distributor road, consisting of a 20 metre reservation.

- OS8** Seek funding under the NeighbourWood Scheme to enable the development of Cleveragh Woodlands. (no map reference) (see section 2.17.6)