

CHAPTER 14

Recreation and Open Space Strategy



14.1 Introduction

The Council, as a Planning Authority, has an important role to play in creating living environments that promote and facilitate active and passive recreation, physical activity and social inclusion. This chapter sets out the strategy and objectives to guide the spatial development of open space and recreation facilities in the county and to facilitate increased participation in physical and recreational activities. These facilities, while contributing to the physical and mental wellbeing of our residents, are also important stimuli in attracting employment and enterprise to the county and in the development of recreation tourism, making the county an attractive place to live, work and visit.

14.2 Climate Action and Recreation

Recreation and open spaces offer many opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the changing climate. In this regard, the planning authority will, inter alia:

- Ensure that recreation facilities and open spaces are located in existing settlements, close to residential areas and other community facilities to reduce the need to travel, and use sustainable transport modes to get there e.g. public transport, walking and cycling.
- Prioritise walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments.
- Develop a connected network of greenways for safe recreational cycling and walking.
- Develop well-managed, well-located and well-connected open spaces that operate as part of a wider green network in the urban settlements.
- Protect and expand green infrastructure provisions in existing and new recreation and open space areas, including the retention of existing and planting of new trees.
- Protect and enhance the spaces around our river channels, the riparian zone and buffer from development which would reduce its ability to attenuate and filter flood water.
- Ensure that recreational buildings are climate resilient and energy efficient.

14.3 Policy Context

This chapter has been prepared in line with relevant national, regional and local strategies, in particular, Healthy Ireland, the NPF and the RSES.

National Physical Activity Plan

'Get Ireland Active' is the National Physical Activity Plan (NPAP) for the country and it stems from the Government's Healthy Ireland-A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013-2025. Action 4 of the Plan focuses on the built and natural environment and how the promotion of its use and the promotion of active transport are the most practical and sustainable ways to increase physical activity as part of the everyday routine. The way the built environment is designed, planned and built can also act as a barrier to be active and can reinforce sedentary behaviour and car dependence¹.

National Sports Policy 2018 – 2027 (Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2018)

This policy sets out a Vision for Irish Sport in 2027 along with 57 actions to transform the sporting landscape over the next decade. Action 13 of the Plan focuses on how the wider natural and built environment can facilitate participation in sport and physical activity taking account of the type of activities in which adults are increasingly participating such as running, cycling, outdoor adventure pursuits and recreational walking.

Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors

This policy recognises and encourages all forms of sport and physical activity in the outdoors undertaken for social, recreational or competitive purposes. It includes sport and recreation facilities that are carried out in a natural or semi-natural environment and involve dealing with natural elements. It also includes sport and recreation activities that take place on infrastructure such as trails, greenways, cycle tracks and roads, both in urban and rural landscapes. The policy highlights the social, physical and health benefits associated with participating in sport and physical activity and it also supports the implementation of policies on participation in sport by people with disabilities and women in sport.

¹ Get Ireland Active -National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland, Department of Health and Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, 2016, p23.

National Planning Framework

Quality of life and place lies at the heart of the NPF. In line with the NPAP, the NPF outlines that design affects people's behaviour, and the places in which we live, work and play can affect both our physical and mental wellbeing. Communities that are designed in a way that supports physical activity e.g. generously sized footpaths and cycle lanes and accessible recreational areas, encourage residents to make healthy choices and live healthier lives.

Through NSO 8 Enhanced amenities and heritage, the NPF seeks to ensure that towns and villages are attractive and can offer a good quality of life. This will require investment in well-designed public realm which includes public spaces, parks and streets as well as recreational infrastructure. It also includes amenities in rural areas such as national and forest parks and trails such as greenways, blueways and peatways. NPO 26 supports the objectives of public health policy including Healthy Ireland and the NPAP while NPO 27 focuses on prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and future developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Southern Region

The RSES further outlines that the quality of recreational and sporting facilities contributes to good physical and mental health and wider social, cultural and economic benefits for communities. It outlines that local authorities and partner organisations should seek to provide for a range of open space and sporting and recreational facilities to include:

- Formal open spaces (passive);
- Informal (active) open space or recreational areas designed for greater physical and sporting activities;
- Access and co-operative arrangements for use of open spaces belonging to privately managed or community/voluntary clubs and organisations;
- Provision for full accessibility to sporting and recreational areas and facilities;
- Sustainable linkages to nearby communities and neighbourhoods including provision of new or enhanced cycling and walking routes; and
- The development of greenways, blueways and peatways and connecting settlements in the region along greenway corridors.

RPO 198 Sport and community organisations, RPO 199 Larger sports projects, RPO 200 Green infrastructure and recreation and RPO 201 National trails, walking routes, greenway and blueway corridors have been incorporated into this strategy.

Wexford Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021

One of the key priorities of the Wexford LECP is the need to support the general physical and mental health and wellbeing of the county's citizens. High Level Goal 2 is *"to support and promote the development of socially inclusive sustainable communities in County Wexford and ensure that all citizens enjoy optimal health and well-being"*. The LECP emphasises the value of community facilities, local sports organisations and recreational open space as important resources to improve health and well-being and to cultivate healthy attitudes. There are a number of direct and indirect objectives and actions in the LECP to implement this goal and the County Development Plan supports the LECP in this regard.

Healthy Wexford County Plan 2020-2022

This Plan supports the implementation of Healthy Ireland, the national health and wellbeing framework, at a local level, to improve the health and wellbeing of all in County Wexford. The Plan has six key priority areas and includes a number of associated actions. These include the development of local infrastructure such as trails, playgrounds, nature corridors and parks, providing access to physical activity infrastructure such as beaches and trails to people with disabilities, integrating physical activity infrastructure (i.e., cycle paths) into new developments and rejuvenating town and village spaces for the enjoyment of the community. The County Development Plan supports the Healthy County Plan in this regard.

Sport Active Wexford

Sports Active Wexford is one of a national network of 29 Local Sports Partnerships established under the aegis of Sports Ireland. It published its Strategic Plan 2017-2021 in November 2017. The aim of the Plan is to increase participation levels in physical activity by all Wexford people regardless of age, gender or ability. The Plan is focused around three themes-(i) empowering communities, (ii) enabling inclusion and (iii) supporting the sports sector. The overall vision is for a county where all people are encouraged and enabled to participate in some form of physical activity, stay

physically active across the life stages and succeed in achieving their goals.

14.4 Recreation and Open Space Strategy

The Council is committed to developing sustainable communities who have a good quality of life and personal health and wellbeing. The provision of a high quality network of open spaces and recreation facilities will contribute to this and will make the county an attractive place to live, work and visit. This strategy sets out the spatial planning approach to the development of open space and recreation facilities. Its focus is to ensure that these spaces and facilities are planned in a strategic manner to allow both urban and rural communities across the county to access a range of high quality, safe and accessible open space and recreational opportunities to improve their quality of life and wellbeing.

14.4.1 Goal, Strategic Aims and Objectives

The overall goal is to ensure that County Wexford is a healthy county with physical environments, amenities and resources that everyone, regardless of their age or ability, can use and to ensure good physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The strategic aims to achieve this are to:

- Develop healthy communities by promoting physical activity and active living as a means of enhancing health, wellbeing and social inclusion.
- Ensure that new developments apply the highest standards of place making integrating a variety of recreational uses of space such as sport, play and passive uses
- Ensure the spatial planning, development and design of our towns and villages promotes active living and physical activity by prioritising cycling and walking and the development of local recreational spaces.
- Provide for the development of facilities that contribute to the improvement of the health and wellbeing of the county's residents and facilitate participation by all in sport, recreation and play.
- Ensure that open space and recreation developments and activities are carried out in a sustainable manner and ensure the protection of environmental quality, natural and built heritage and residential amenities.

- Ensure that open spaces are designed as multifunctional spaces which may provide flood relief, sustainable urban drainage systems, biodiversity and ecosystem services as well as their active and passive recreation functions.

Recreation and Open Space Strategic Objectives

It is the objective of the Council:

Objective ROS01

To support the implementation of the National Sports Plan 2018-2027, Get Ireland Active-the National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland 2015-2020, Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors, the Wexford Healthy County Plan 2020-2022, the Wexford Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2021 and the Sports Active Wexford Strategic Plan 2017-2022 and any updated version of these plans as a means of promoting physical activity and active living in order to enhance health, wellbeing and social inclusion subject to the objectives of the County Development Plan.

Objective ROS02

To support the implementation of any future Recreation Strategy for the county subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS03

To ensure urban and rural communities have access to a range of high quality open space, sporting, recreation and play facilities that are appropriate in scale and location and are universally accessible and suitable for all ages. These facilities should be located in existing settlements, close to residential areas and other community facilities so as to maximise participation levels and reduce the need to travel.

Objective ROS04

To ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

Objective ROS05

To ensure that open spaces and recreational facilities are multi-functional spaces incorporating biodiversity, SuDS and flood attenuation, where appropriate.

Objective ROS06

To support community groups and sporting organisations in the development of parks, spaces, community gardens, allotments and community gardens, sporting facilities and play facilities subject to residential amenity and proper planning and sustainable development.

Objective ROS07

To promote an awareness/educational campaign on the wildlife and sensitivity of habitats to public recreational use in areas of high biodiversity such as upland areas, coastal areas, designated sites and ecological networks, including the provision of appropriate signage.

14.5 Open Space

14.5.1 The Role of Open Space

High quality, accessible parks, open spaces and greenways provide health benefits and are important components in the development of quality urban and rural environments. Open space can take many forms and provides a variety of functions, including passive recreation, active recreation, play, visual amenity, ecology, drainage

regulation and even meet socio-economic needs (meeting places, allotments and travelling carnivals).

There are generally three categories of open space provision – public, semi-public or sport club spaces and private open space. Public open space is a vital element in the creation of a quality urban environment, offering opportunities for passive and active recreation, contributing to the quality of life of communities and the identity of towns or villages, whilst also offering environmental and ecological benefits. Private open space provision is a fundamental element of residential amenity, offering the resident an opportunity for safe and private recreation.

Community clubs and sporting organisations have a crucial role in providing for the sporting and recreational needs of our communities. They usually operate on a membership basis. These spaces are vital for physical activity and are also important for community identity and must be planned for in the development of our towns and villages.

14.5.2 Open Space in Town and Villages

Compact growth², and the consolidation of the existing built-up areas in our towns and villages through increased residential densities and maximising the potential of under-developed lands, requires careful consideration and there must be an increased focus on the delivery of high quality public and private open spaces.

The Council continues to expand its network of public parks in the main towns including the recently developed Min Ryan Park at Killeens, Wexford Town and the redevelopment of Gorey Town Park and Showgrounds. Library Park in the centre of New Ross Town and the Orchard Peace Park in Enniscorthy Town make a significant contribution to the visual, landscape and recreational amenities of these areas.

The planning of future open spaces within towns and villages will have regard to a number of different factors including, inter alia, the level of existing open space provision in the area, the location of existing and planned residential areas, the need to provide high quality open spaces within a short walk of most dwellings and the most appropriate locations for new or upgraded open spaces.

² National Strategic Outcome 1 of the National Planning Framework

14.5.3 Hierarchy of Public Open Spaces

The Council will apply the hierarchy of public open spaces set out in Table 14-1 and lands will be zoned accordingly in local area plans for Level 1 and Level 2 open spaces. This is to ensure these open spaces are delivered at appropriate locations. The need for all three levels will depend on the nature, function and size of the settlement.

A lot of settlements in the county will not have a local area plan and as such there will be no formal hierarchy of open space. This will have to be considered on a case-by-case basis and will depend on the size of the existing settlement and proposals to develop the settlement.

In general, Service and Strategic Settlements and Large Villages will require one Level 2 Neighbourhood Park which will be required to be integrated or partially integrated into new developments. They will also be required to have a spatial balance of Level 3 Pocket Parks within existing and new residential developments. Small Villages, depending on their existing population level, may only require Level 3 Pocket Parks but all settlements benefit from communal public spaces and the Council will support their provision. In all cases, the Council will consider the appropriate location for the Level 2 Neighbourhood Parks and will work with local community groups and developers of future residential schemes to secure the delivery of both Level 2 and Level 3 open spaces.

Table 14-1 Hierarchy of Public Open Spaces

Level	Description	Function
1	Hub Parks	These are the highest level of open space and provide a range of high quality open spaces for active and passive recreation, e.g. open playing fields, walking tracks, park runs, cycle paths, outdoor gym and a playground ³ . These parks will be located at strategic, accessible locations within a town.
2	Neighbourhood Parks	These are high quality open spaces which should be distributed so that most homes are within a 10 minute

³ See Section 14.6 Play Facilities. It is envisaged that this will be to a Destination playground or an equivalent standard as set out in the Council's Playground Strategy 2017-2022.

Level	Description	Function
		walk of them. These spaces must be sufficient in size to be useful spaces and as such should be between 1ha-2ha. In general, 15% ⁴ of the total area of a residential site will be allocated to public open space. Neighbourhood parks will account for 10% of this allocation. These parks may be achieved by combining with existing spaces to make one large useful open space. It is envisaged that they will provide active playing fields, a playground ⁵ , outdoor gym equipment and seating areas.
3	Pocket Parks	Pockets parks will account for the remaining 5% of the public open space allocation in a residential scheme. These are the lowest level of public open space but are very important components of successful neighbourhoods. These spaces provide important visual and social functions and they provide play areas for small children. Pocket parks must be well located within the development and be adequately overlooked and protected from vehicular traffic.

14.5.4 Delivery of Public Open Spaces

The mechanism for the delivery of all three levels will be determined in the relevant local area plan or as follows in the event that there is no local area plan in place.

Hub Parks

The delivery of a Hub Park will be either by the Council supported by the Development Contribution Scheme or delivered in tandem with the development of residential lands and other lands.

Neighbourhoods Parks

Developers will deliver these parks as part of their overall development proposal. The park should therefore be included within the site edge red and full specifications of the design and layout of the park shall be submitted with the planning application. It is noted the location of these parks may not reflect landowner parcels. Where there

⁴ It will not be appropriate to provide small parcels to aggregate to the required 15% public open space. A minimum of 10% must be in one large useful space.

⁵ See Section 14.6 Play Facilities. It is envisaged that the playground will perform a Neighbourhood Playground function as defined in the Council's Playground Strategy 2017-2022.

are two or more land ownerships involved in the neighbourhood parks, a proposal must be submitted with the planning application to address this. The delivery may also be phased within the scheme where appropriate.

If there is no identified/zoned Neighbourhood Park parcel in the area of the proposed development, the 10% neighbourhood park open space allocation may be provided as follows:

- It may be offset against other neighbourhood parks previously provided by the developer where there is in excess of the 10% of the previous development site and which will serve the proposed development. That Neighbourhood Park must be within a five minute walk of the proposed development. In order to avail of this, it will be necessary to identify the open space in the earlier planning application, identify which lands it serves and to design the space so that it serves both developments in terms of area, quality, linkages and play facilities.
- The 10% is provided within the residential scheme as a single space.
- The developer may contribute a special financial contribution to be used by the Council in the provision of a neighbourhood park in the area.

Pocket Parks

These will be delivered by the developer as part of the overall development proposal.

Deviations from Quantitative Standards

In cases where the density required or site topography or configuration do not allow for the quantitative standards above, the Planning Authority will accept an increase in the qualitative standards of the site in lieu or the payment of a special development contribution to the Planning Authority. In such cases, the onus will be on the applicant to demonstrate that the new development will be high quality. The developer must, at minimum, invest the equivalent monetary value of the deficit in the 15% in improvements to the quality of the scheme. The developer shall submit a valuation of the deficit and add to it the cost of 'standard landscaping' (site works and grass/footpaths/planting). The net improvements must be at minimum equivalent to site cost and the landscaping costs. The costing for the land must be based on evidenced current market value and the cost of the landscaping (both standard and proposed) must be provided by a landscape architect or quantity surveyor. Where

such a reduction in quantum of space is accepted the Planning Authority will require the proposed design to be of exceptional quality. Examples of improved quality will be high quality paved public realm areas, biodiversity enhancements, play or outdoor gym equipment, high quality seating/outdoor dining areas.

In all cases, full specifications for paving, landscaping, planting etc. will be required to be submitted with the planning application in order for the Planning Authority to fully assess the quality of the space.

14.5.5 Communal Amenity Space in Apartment Developments

The provision and proper future maintenance of well-designed communal amenity space is important in meeting the amenity needs of residents. In particular, accessible, secure and usable outdoor space is a high priority for families with young children and for less mobile older people. The minimum required areas for public communal amenity space are set out in the Sustainable Urban Housing-Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (2020) and Table 14-2.

Table 14-2 Minimum Floor Areas for Communal Amenity Space

Apartment Type	Community Amenity Space
Studio	4m ²
One bedroom	5m ²
Two bedroom (3 person)	6m ²
Two bedroom (4 person)	7m ²
Three bedroom	9m ²

Where these standards will result in less than 15% being provided, the Planning Authority will require an improvement in the quality of the scheme in accordance with criteria outlined in Section 14.5.4. In the case of apartment developments, the quality of the open space is particularly important as private amenity space is much smaller and the 'standard landscape' costing must comprise site works and paving. In general, the higher the density the higher the specification for the public spaces shall be.

The applicant will be required to consider innovative solutions such as roof gardens, outdoor exercise facilities, play facilities, and high quality paved surfaces fully designed with high quality street furniture and landscape features. There should be an emphasis on high quality and ease of maintenance.

14.5.6 Merging and Linking Public Open Spaces

Open space is an excellent way of integrating new and older developments by adding new open space to an existing open space. The Council will encourage new developments to merge with existing development where possible. This will be mutually beneficial providing spaces which are large enough to be usable while increasing permeability and integrating communities. This approach could facilitate the provision of an attractive, safe pedestrian linkage to the adjoining new development increasing permeability and making walking and cycling easier, and can be achieved through successful community consultation.

14.5.7 Designing Public Open Spaces

Open spaces must be designed and laid out to a high standard and emphasis must be placed on quality and long term sustainability of the open space. Public open spaces should be overlooked on all sides and designed to ensure the potential for anti-social behaviour is minimised through passive surveillance.

The Council will implement the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas-Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Community, 2009) which provides detailed guidance on the provision of open space in new residential developments. Planning applications for residential

development must also be accompanied by a detailed landscaping plan, prepared by a suitably qualified landscape professional, which specifies all proposed landscaping (both hard and soft). The maintenance of open spaces will be dealt with by condition of the planning permission.

Location and Layout of Open Spaces

The location and layout of open spaces should be among the first consideration in the design of a scheme. Open spaces should be located so that they are accessible by the largest possible number of people in the scheme. The space should be considered first, in particular how the buildings will be used to define it. There should be a positive and defined relationship between the buildings and spaces and opportunities to create interesting urban form such as squares and crescents should be taken where appropriate. Such positive relationships create a sense of enclosure and comfort, a sense ownership by the residents and increase the place value and quality of the scheme.

Use of Existing Features

The design of the scheme should optimise the existing features and topography of the site. Features such as rivers, streams, rock outcrops, trees and hedgerows should be retained for their biodiversity value but also because they add to the sense of place in a way that designed features cannot. Spaces should be orientated so as they maximise solar gain and extend time of use. Public spaces should be fully usable and the Planning Authority will not accept sites which are too sloped or otherwise unusable in fulfilment of the quantitative space requirements.

Biodiversity in Open Spaces

Our open spaces offer the opportunity to increase biodiversity in our towns and villages. Biodiversity must in the first instance be considered at the neighbourhood scale. The designer must try and link the open spaces and landscape features and planting to existing features in the wider neighbourhood. Such linking allows for the spread of plant and animal diversity throughout our towns and villages, and these corridors and stepping stones are vital for wildlife.

The next step is to consider the biodiversity within the site and what opportunities there are to retain and enhance the existing features. Opportunities to retain existing

features should be optimised. Such features include rivers, streams, wetlands, trees, rock outcrops and stone walls. The retention of and appropriate treatment of such features may in some instances be offset against quantitative standards for open space.

Biodiversity must also be considered in the design of the scheme. The importance of connectivity for urban wildlife cannot be underestimated. The design should ensure that there are green corridors linking the spaces in the scheme through the provision of new hedgerows, planting and street trees.

Primarily native tree species should be used in the planting of the scheme. The exception to this will be street trees where other varieties may be more important due to potential for interference with buildings or for dramatic aesthetic effect. The scheme should also integrate pollinators of different flowering times throughout the scheme. The Planning Authority will encourage the development of ecotones⁶ and the appropriate grading of habitats. Locations close to edges and hedges should be allowed a level of growth which will facilitate the movement and shelter of small mammals.

The Planning Authority will also encourage the use of measures specifically designed to enhance wildlife in residential schemes such as holes left in boundary walls to allow for passage of hedgehogs between gardens, bat and swift boxes.

Sustainable Drainage Systems, Flood Attenuation and Riparian Zones in Open Spaces

The planning and design of schemes needs to consider the integration of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), flood attenuation and the protection of watercourses and their associated riparian zones.

The Planning Authority will consider the integration of SuDS where possible and appropriate in public open spaces, and only where it contributes to the design and quality of the open space.

Where there is a watercourse within or adjoining the site, flood attenuation and the importance of the riparian zone for both this and biodiversity needs to be considered and protected. In this regard, designers will be required to have regard to the 'Planning for Watercourse in the Urban Environment Guidelines (Inland Fisheries

⁶ An ecotone is an area that acts as a boundary or a transition between two ecosystems.

Ireland, 2020) and ensure that the guidance with regard to the function, width, vegetative target and allowable uses for each sub-zone (streamside zone, middle zone and outer zone) is adhered to.

Allotments and Community Gardens as Open Spaces

Allotments and community gardens offer the opportunity to provide education in horticulture as well as on the sustainable value of home food production. Working in an allotment or a community garden is a healthy physical recreation for all age groups and gives people the opportunity for social contact and interaction with other members of the community. Facilities required may include the provision of a water supply, parking area, on-site storage, composting and toilet facilities.

The Planning Authority will also consider the provision of allotments/community gardens as part of the open space provision in a residential scheme. The facility should be appropriately located within the scheme, allowing for ease of access by residents, whilst also ensuring that the amenities of residents and visual amenities of the scheme are protected.

Open Space Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS08

To support investment in the on-going maintenance and enhancement of existing public open space facilities, and support the provision of new public parks, green space corridors, pollinator projects, native planting and wild areas and rewilding projects and other public open spaces in tandem with planned population growth to create green, biodiversity rich and healthy settlements throughout the county.

Objective ROS09

To ensure a range of accessible open spaces are provided in towns and villages so that all residents have reasonable access to different types of open space and to ensure that new open spaces are integrated with good pedestrian and cyclist links and provide access for all people regardless of their age or abilities.

Objective ROS10

To ensure that future local area plans apply the hierarchy of public open spaces set out in Section 14.4.3 where relevant and appropriate and outline the mechanism for the delivery for each level of open space. The Planning Authority will also carry out an audit of underutilised lands during the preparation of local area plans to identify underutilised lands that could be zoned for sporting, community and leisure uses and activities to increase the availability of same for local communities.

Objective ROS11

To require the provision of good quality, accessible, well located and functional open spaces in new residential developments in accordance with the guidance in this chapter, the standards in Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas-Guidelines for Planning Authorities and its companion document Urban Design Manual (Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2009), and where applicable, the standards in Sustainable Urban Housing Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, 2020) and any future version of these guidelines documents and save as otherwise required by the objectives and development management standards in this Plan.

Objective ROS12

To require public open spaces to create positive and defined relationships between buildings and spaces and interesting urban forms such as squares and crescents, contributing to a sense of enclosure and comfort, place value and quality and ownership by the residents.

Objective ROS13

To facilitate the development of allotments, community gardens and pollinator projects, native planting, wild areas and rewilding projects at appropriate locations and on suitable sites which are accessible from the built-up areas of the county taking into consideration the demand for such facilities and subject to normal planning and

environmental criteria including potential impacts on residential and visual amenities. The Planning Authority will identify land for use as allotments, community gardens and linked networks of green infrastructure in larger towns and villages during the preparation of local area plans. The Planning Authority will also consider the provision of allotments, community gardens and wild areas/nature pockets as part of the public open space provision in new residential schemes subject to appropriate siting, design and layout, protection of residential and visual amenities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS14

To facilitate, through community consultation and involvement, the merging and linking of existing open spaces with new open spaces as a mechanism for providing larger more useful public open spaces, improving permeability and promoting social cohesion.

Objective ROS15

To avoid the loss of public and private recreational open space and facilities unless alternative recreational facilities are provided in a suitable location.

Objective ROS16

To ensure a detailed landscaping plan, for both hard and soft landscaping, prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect, accompanies all major planning applications for residential schemes of ten or more houses and significant industrial and commercial developments of 1,000m² gross floor space or more.

Objective ROS17

To require the provision of public open space to comply with the quantitative standards set out in Section 14.5.4. Where this is not possible for reasons including density and site topography, the Planning Authority will consider a deviation from those quantitative standards in favour of increases in the quality of the open space that comply with the measures also set out in Section 14.5.4. The Planning Authority

will not accept open space lands which are too sloped or otherwise unusable in fulfilment of either quantitative or qualitative space requirements.

Objective ROS18

To support the development of skate parks and outdoor gyms in public open spaces and parks at appropriate locations in the County.

Objective ROS19

To ensure that the design of residential schemes, including open spaces, optimises the existing features and topography of the site such as rivers, streams, rock outcrops, trees and hedgerows, and to ensure that biodiversity and green infrastructure are fully considered and integrated into schemes.

Objective ROS20

To encourage the use of measures specifically designed to enhance wildlife in residential schemes such as holes left in boundary walls to allow for the passage of hedgehogs between gardens, the installation of bat and swift boxes and pollinator projects, native planting and wild areas and rewilding projects. The incorporation of wildlife information signage will be encouraged.

14.6 Play Facilities

The Council's Playground Strategy 2017-2022 is based on a vision that "all children will be given the opportunity to play together in challenging and fun environments, irrespective of their social backgrounds or level of ability". The Strategy provides a hierarchy of playgrounds and guidance on their location and scale. This is set out in Table 14-3.

Table 14-3 Wexford County Council Hierarchy of Playgrounds

Playground Type	Characteristics
Destination	This is a large Municipal playground located in a centre of population with access to toilets and accessible car parking. It will serve a population radius of 20km. It is a larger space or facility within which children or young people can enjoy informal recreation with their peers and access a wide range of play experiences. There are Destination Playgrounds in Gorey Town Park, New Ross Town Park, The Promenade, Enniscorthy Town, and Redmond Park, Wexford. It is also proposed to develop a Destination playground at the Min Ryan Park in Wexford Town.
Community	This is a community/village playground and will serve a population radius of 10km. These are larger spaces for children beginning to travel independently or with friends and with pathways for adults with young children to walk with ease.
Neighbourhood	This is a local playground and will serve populations within a 1km radius. It is a local space where young children accompanied by an adult can play safely.

The Council will provide Destination Playgrounds and will assist community groups to develop Community and Neighbourhood playgrounds by providing funding through the Playground Development and Refurbishment Policy. All new playgrounds and retrofits will be disability proofed at the design stage. The Strategy also sets out the general design and play value objectives that new playgrounds/retrofits should strive to meet.

Play Facilities in Residential Schemes

The Council will require the provision of suitably designed and landscaped play areas in new residential schemes that families are likely to occupy. Play areas should be located where they can be overlooked by dwellings but will not cause unreasonable nuisance problems for residents. Such facilities should be inclusive and accessible to all children. The play needs of children must be considered as part of the communal amenity space within apartment schemes. The Apartment Guidelines for Planning Authorities set out standards for children's play areas.

Objectives ROS23 relates to play facilities in residential schemes (either houses or a mixture of houses and apartments) while Objective ROS24 relates to play facilities in apartment only residential schemes.

Play Facilities Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS21

To ensure that a range of play opportunities will be available for all children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have special needs.

Objective ROS22

To implement the Wexford County Council Playground Strategy 2017-2022 and any updated version of this strategy prepared during the lifetime of the Plan.

Objective ROS23

To require high quality landscaped and play facilities to form part of new residential schemes in towns and villages. For residential schemes of 99 dwellings or less landscaped areas shall be provided to encourage creative play and games. The Planning Authority will consider either or a combination of the following options for residential schemes⁷ which comprise only houses or a mix of houses and apartments and which propose 100+ units (in phased development schemes of less than 50 units the following will apply once the 50+ unit threshold is met).

- The developer may propose to provide a playground facility as part of the scheme at a rate of 4m² per residential unit. A minimum of one piece of play equipment shall be provided for every 50m² of playground up to a maximum of eight pieces. In larger residential schemes or phased schemes (>100 residential units) play facilities should incorporate proposals for larger play areas (playing pitches, courts, MUGAs etc.).
- Where the residential scheme includes apartments, the developer will be required

⁷ Objective ROS24 sets out the standards for play facilities that will apply to residential schemes that only propose apartments.

to allocate a proportionate amount of the overall total requirement to provide a dedicated play area for the apartment element with a particular focus on the play needs of smaller children (< 6 years of age). The play area will be provided at a rate of 4m² for every apartment with two or more bedrooms. This element should be designed in accordance with the Apartment Guidelines.

- The developer may propose to provide an innovative high quality and safe landscape proposal with an integrated active play facility/natural play areas of equivalent play value in lieu of static fixed play equipment.

Objective ROS24

To require children's play needs in apartment only developments to be provided in accordance with the provisions of the Sustainable Urban Housing: Design Standards for New Apartments Guidelines for Planning Authorities (Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government, 2020) save for the following deviations:

- Schemes providing 50 or more 2 bedroom units shall also provide play areas for older children (>6 years old and young teenagers) at a rate of 4m² per unit.

The Planning Authority may consider reduced play facility requirements where the site is located adjacent to or within a short and safe walking distance of a public playground or a public park with a playground. The Planning Authority may also consider a special development contribution in lieu which shall be of equivalent monetary value to the required play facilities. The developer shall submit the costings of the required play facilities, prepared by a quantity surveyor to inform the monetary value of the special contribution.

14.7 Sports and Leisure Facilities

The Council recognises that sport is an essential component of everyday life, playing a valuable social, cultural and economic role, providing enjoyment for people, a livelihood for some and promoting a healthy lifestyle. The Council is committed to enhancing a range and quality of accessible sports facilities in the county facilitating

the development of the range of facilities from GAA, rugby, soccer and hockey playing fields to boxing clubs, walking tracks, athletics tracks, indoor sports facilities, sailing and diving and ensuring that there is reasonable public access to sport. Outdoor recreational activity is dealt with in Chapter 7 Tourism Development.

Sport facilities should be located at accessible locations which are easy to get to, contribute to the local community's identity and are socially inclusive, providing opportunities for meeting up. The development of sports facilities shall be accompanied by appropriate infrastructure including car parking, bicycle parking and changing rooms.

Commercial leisure facilities are those run on a profit basis and include cinemas, family entertainment centres such as bowling, indoor children's play centres, fitness centres, gyms, swimming pools etc. These facilities should be located in the main towns and tourist centres in order to attract the critical mass to make them viable. Horse racing courses and equine sports facilities along with field sports such as GAA, rugby, soccer and other field sports are considered appropriate in rural locations subject to traffic generation and safety and normal planning criteria.

Sports and Leisure Facilities Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS25

To facilitate a vibrant and active sports sector with increased participation levels, good quality sustainable facilities which are appropriate in scale and location and which provide opportunities for people to play an active role in sport.

Objective ROS26

To support the vision and objectives of national sport policies including working with local sports partnerships, clubs, communities and partnerships within and beyond sport to increase sport and physical activity participation levels.

Objective ROS27

To support investment in the sustainable development of larger sports projects under the Large-Scale Sports Infrastructure Fund subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS28

To support local community and sports groups in developing sports facilities and to consider the development of such facilities at appropriate locations in the county. These facilities, if possible, should be clustered with other community facilities such as community centres and open spaces to create multi user community hubs. The Planning Authority will ensure that sufficient land is zoned in local area plans to facilitate sports clubs and community organisations. The Council will ensure that land is available to accommodate proposals to future proof the expansion of clubs in urban settings and in areas where there is zoned land. Where a site is located away from the centre of a town or village, this will be considered on its merits and how the site would be accessible by walking and cycling. The development must also be appropriate to its location and is subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS29

To ensure that the development of new sports facilities are universally accessible and accompanied by appropriate infrastructure including car parking, bicycle parking and changing rooms.

Objective ROS30

To encourage the development of Multi-User Games Areas (MUGAS) at appropriate locations in the county and ensure that new community facilities and public open spaces are designed to allow flexibility in their use.

Objective ROS31

To encourage the use of school grounds and associated recreational facilities outside of school hours by all members of the community provided that this does not conflict with the delivery of the education service.

Objective ROS32

To ensure that all major commercial leisure developments are located in the main towns and the site selection is based on the sequential approach with the priority being the town centre. Such facilities will not be permitted on land zoned for employment related uses where the development would undermine the ability to cater for employment intensive activities such as manufacturing, industry, office and enterprise. Commercial leisure facilities generate a high level of movement and are best located in places that offer the highest level of accessibility to a range of transport modes, including walking, cycling and public transport.

Objective ROS33

To encourage the development of equine sports including the further development of horse racing courses throughout the County which also provide alternative community and sporting uses.

Objective ROS34

To protect existing sport facilities such as standing handball alleys which should be retained. Their demolition will only be facilitated if alternative provision is made.

14.8 Walking and Cycling Routes

There are many walking trails and cycling routes throughout the county that provide recreational and amenity opportunities for residents and visitors and there are opportunities to further expand this network of trails and routes. Walking and cycling are discussed in this chapter, Chapter 7 Tourism Development and Chapter 8 Transportation Strategy.

Walking trails include established forest trails, scenic mountain passes, coastal paths and heritage walks. Wexford's Coastal Pathway (Slí Charman), which was established in 1993, extends for 221km from Kilmichael Point in the North East corner of the county to Ballyhack in the South-West and is a significant recreational and tourism asset for the county.

The National Trail Offices maintains a National Trails Register which lists all waymarked trails in Ireland including accredited trails which meet certain management standards, new trails which are under development and existing trails which are being extensively redeveloped. There are currently 41 accredited walking/hiking trails in the county - there are 21 locations some of which have multiple trail route options⁸. There are seven Slí na Slainte routes in the county.

Wexford Walking Trails (WWT) is part of the Wexford Trail Brand⁹. It is network of walking trails throughout the county, which was established under a Wexford Local Development training programme, in collaboration with the Council, Local Sports Partnerships, Fáilte Ireland, Waterford Institute of Technology, National Parks and Wildlife Services, National Trails Office and Coillte. Further development of this trails network will focus on enhancing the visitor experience and raising awareness of the quality, diversity and location of our trails. Only those trails which have National Trails Office approval and registration can become members. The walking routes are available to view at www.wexfordwalkingtrails.ie

The National Cycle Framework (2009) aims to provide designated rural cycle networks for visitors and recreational cycling. Fáilte Ireland notes that cycling tourism represents a growing and valuable market segment for rural areas as it offers opportunities for the development of cycle hire and cycling holiday operations. There are three Fáilte Ireland approved looped cycling routes in the county: Route 1 Slaney (53km), Route 2 Coastal (35km) and Route 3 South Wexford (78km).

Wexford Cycling Trails has two approved cycling trails. The Eurovelo 1 route has been developed in the south of the county. The route, which is 120km in distance, starts at Rosslare Europort and follows quiet, scenic coastal country roads and villages finishing at Ballyhack Ferry (to County Waterford). The Nine Stones Loop is the second trail in the north of the County. The trail traverses County Wexford for the most part, but also enters parts of County Carlow and County Wicklow. The cycle loop is a total of 118km of sign-posted cycle route.

⁸ www.irishtrails.ie (March 2020)

⁹ Other Wexford Trails include Wexford Craft Trail, Wexford Garden Trail, Wexford Heritage Trail and Wexford Cycling Trail.

The proposed greenways in the county will also add to the selection of cycling routes. These greenways are discussed in Chapter 7 Tourism Development and Chapter 8 Transportation Strategy with objectives to support the development of greenways subject to a number of provisos including compliance with the Habitats Directive and the use should not preclude the reopening of railway lines in the future.

Off-road cycling in the form of mountain biking is also growing in popularity. Coillte's Off-Road Cycling Strategy (2012) recognises that the development of a high-quality, off-road cycle trail network would support rural tourism, increase active participation in sport for citizens and potentially develop a revenue stream to fund management and maintenance of trails. The Strategy identifies potential locations for development of off-road cycle trails over the next ten years on lands which are in the ownership of Coillte. In County Wexford, Forth Mountain is identified as a potential location for an off-road cycling centre of regional scale¹⁰ while Bree Hill and Deerpark/Kilbrannish are identified as potential club trails¹¹. The Strategy also recognises the potential for community or family trails, which could be developed in partnership with local development companies, community groups or local authorities, to provide for local and community recreation.

The Council will prepare strategies for walking and cycling in the county to inform and co-ordinated the development of the necessary accessible infrastructure to facilitate and encourage more walking and cycling for both everyday transport and leisure purposes.

Walking and Cycling Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS35

To prepare a Walking Strategy for the county to inform the development and co-ordination of the necessary accessible infrastructure to facilitate and encourage more walking for both everyday transport and leisure purposes.

¹⁰ An off road cycling centre is generally 20-30km of waymarked trails with a minimum of two independent waymarked loops. These centres are primarily day-visit destinations for domestic markets with basic visitor facilities and the possibility for add-on developments such as bike hire and provision of light refreshments as part of the centre.

¹¹ Club trails are areas where some level of user built trails have been constructed or where local clubs actively use the forests for activities or events.

Objective ROS36

To prepare a Cycling Strategy for the county to inform the development and co-ordination of the necessary infrastructure to facilitate and encourage more cycling for both everyday transport and leisure purposes.

Objective ROS37

To facilitate sustainable outdoor recreation in the form of walking and cycling at appropriate locations in the county and maximise the recreational and tourist potential of walking and cycling routes subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, the protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas, the amenities of host communities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS38

To seek to promote and support access to rural areas including upland areas, forestry, coastal areas and the development of existing walking routes, pilgrim paths, mountain trails and nature trails in conjunction with other public bodies, representative agencies and community groups subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, the protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas and the amenities of host communities. This will include identifying and protecting existing paths, walkways and public rights of way.

Objective ROS39

To engage with representative bodies, local groups, landowners and where relevant adjoining local authorities in order to support the sustainable development of walking and cycling routes.

Objective ROS40

To support the Wexford Walking Trails brand and promote and facilitate the expansion of the walking trail network subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas and the amenities of host communities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS41

To facilitate the development and use of the Wexford Coastal Pathway (Slí Charman) as a recreation and tourist facility subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, the protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas, the amenities of host communities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS42

To provide and maintain new/improved coastal access points and right-of-ways subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS43

To facilitate the development of riverside walking routes whilst protecting areas of ecological value and ensuring that any development takes cognisance of the aims and objectives of the Water Framework Directive and ensuring that all development is undertaken in compliance with the Habitats Directive, the protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas and the amenities of host communities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS44

To facilitate the development of disused railways for amenity purposes, including the development of walkways, cycleways or bridleways, provided that the use does not conflict with or prejudice the re-opening of railway lines in the future and subject to compliance with relevant objectives in Chapter 7 Tourism Development, Chapter 8 Transportation Strategy, the Habitats Directive, protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas and the amenities of host communities, normal planning and environmental criteria and the development management standards contained in Volume 2.

Objective ROS45

To support investment in the development of universally accessible (including by mobility scooters) walking and cycling facilities and greenways and to explore the potential to develop greenway corridor linkages between settlements to create interregional greenways subject to complying with the relevant objectives in Chapter 7 Tourism Development, Chapter 8 Transportation Strategy, the Habitats Directives and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS46

To support the Wexford Cycling Trails brand and facilitate the development of the National Cycle Network in the county, improve cycle routes with better signposting, better road surfaces and greater safety for the cyclist and to ensure that new urban road infrastructure and traffic management measures are designed to be cyclist friendly.

Objective ROS47

To engage with Coillte in the investigation of the suitability of developing off-road cycling trails at Forth Mountain, Bree Hill and Deerpark/Kilbrannish in accordance with Coillte's Off-Road Cycling Strategy (2012), provided that they do not negatively impact on residential amenity, landscape, heritage or the environment and subject to compliance normal planning and environmental criteria.

14.9 Public Rights of Way

Public rights of way constitute an important amenity and are an economic asset. They enable enjoyment of the county's high quality landscapes and cultural heritage and are important for tourism development and recreation. A public right of way is a person's right of passage along a road or path, even if the road or path is not in public ownership. They can be created by use from time immemorial (the distant past beyond memory or record), by statute or by dedication by the full owner of the land.

The formal process for designating rights of way is dealt with in Section 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended). The Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010 introduced a new mandatory requirement for Development Plans to include an objective for the preservation of public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational utility. These public rights of way must be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the Development Plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the Development Plan. The Council will endeavour to list and map public rights of way during the life of this Plan.

Wexford County Council recognises the legal rights of all landowners and that rights of access to their lands may only be obtained with their permission where an existing right of way does not exist. The Council also commends the 'open access' policy of Coillte and recognises that this policy does not equate to a public right of way.

Public Rights of Way Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS48

To preserve public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational activity. These public rights of way shall be identified both by marking them on at least one of the maps forming part of the Development Plan and by indicating their location on a list appended to the Development Plan during the life of the Plan and the County Development Plan will be varied accordingly.

Objective ROS49

To identify the existing public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational activity using the following methodology:

- Place an advert in local papers seeking submissions from the public to identify public rights of way which give access to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational utility.

- Identify existing rights of ways, paths, and access points to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational activity.
- Identify access points to seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational activity which the Council have maintained or repaired with a view to identifying public rights of way.
- Carry out a desktop analysis of public records, maps, aerial photographs and newspaper accounts to identify reputations of public rights of way.
- Once the list is compiled, advertise and put on display the proposed list of public rights of way. The public will be invited to make submissions on the validity of the public rights of way.
- Endeavour to verify and list the public rights of way and begin the formal process for designating rights of way under Section 14 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).
- Vary the Plan to include the list and map showing the public rights of way.

Objective ROS50

To ensure that development does not impinge on public walking routes and public rights of way, particularly those at the seashore, mountain, lakeshore, riverbank or other places of natural beauty or recreational activity.

14.10 Natural Amenities

County Wexford has a range of natural amenities which can be enjoyed for leisure or recreation purposes. With its extensive coastline, mountains and river valleys there is potential to develop outdoor activities and maximise the use of our natural surroundings while at the same time ensuring the protection of the environment. The Council will seek to sustain the quality of these natural amenities such as beaches, dunes and mountainsides for their recreational qualities.

It is an objective of the Council:

Objective ROS51

To facilitate the use of natural amenity areas in the county for recreational purposes while ensuring the protection of scenic and environmentally sensitive areas including, but not limited to, Natura 2000 sites.

Objective ROS52

To facilitate the provision of access to amenity areas such as beaches, inland waterways, forests and heritage sites in co-operation with landowners and continue to maintain and improve existing accesses, subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive, the protection of natural heritage, the character of rural areas and the amenities of host communities and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS53

To facilitate Coillte in the protection of existing and the development of additional forest amenity sites and walks subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive and normal planning and environmental criteria.

Objective ROS54

To support the development of the amenities and recreation potential of the River Slaney and River Barrow in co-operation with National Parks and Wildlife Service, Inland Waterways, adjoining Local Authorities, Harbour Masters and all other relevant authorities. All such development should be undertaken in compliance with Articles 6 and Article 10 of the Habitats Directive.

Objective ROS55

To identify beaches within the county which can best service the needs of persons with disabilities and to improve accessibility and universally designed facilities at these beaches in association with disability representative groups and subject to compliance with the Habitats Directive and normal planning and environmental criteria.