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Submission in relation to the Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2021 - 2031

We have seen in recent times the importance of open spaces and recreational areas in our communities. A price cannot be put on the value of a playground, town park, forest trail, canal towpath, peat way through the local bog or similar open space amenities, in terms of the benefits for our community's physical and mental health.

I therefore welcome the work to produce a new Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Strategy for the period 2021 - 2031 and I am delighted to take the opportunity to provide feedback that will help to shape this very important strategy document for Kildare County Council.

Thanks,

Playground Sites & Priority One Open Spaces

It is recommended that the strategy outlines an objective to immediately seek and purchase land for playgrounds and accompanying open spaces for those villages identified as 'Priority One' in the previous Open Space Strategy 2011.

The availability of appropriate open spaces would appear to be the primary blocker to establishing a new playground in an area and the previous Open Space Strategy included detailed data on this.

Inadequate forward planning for Allenwood, to take an example, resulted in the central village area being zoned entirely commercial and residential, with no open space suitable for a playground or community use.



Similarly in Derrinturn, despite local area plans being drawn up and revised over recent decades, an open space suitable for a playground cannot be found in the present day.

Settlement Compliance with Quantitative Open Space Standards

Settlement Name	NPFA Achieved 2006 (%)	NPFA Achieved 2017 (%)	DOE Achieved 2006 (%)	DOE Achieved 2017 (%)
Allenwood	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Athgarvan	130.51	109.11	156.62	130.93
Athy**	245.87	182.87	295.04	219.45
Ballymore Eustace	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Castledermot	205.00	163.96	246.00	196.75
Celbridge	104.33	71.80	125.19	86.15
Clane	88.9	74.37	106.68	89.24
Derrinturn	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Kilcock	198.47	136.62	238.16	163.94
Kilcullen	161.22	119.89	193.47	143.87
Kildare	78.88	58.43	94.65	70.12
Kill	129.83	108.59	155.80	130.31
Leixlip	269.86	185.71	323.83	222.85
Maynooth	195.80	131.97	234.96	158.37
Monasterevin	153.70	114.33	184.44	137.19
Moone	86.54	69.13	103.85	82.96
Naas	321.50	230.70	385.8	276.84
Newbridge	140.37	102.91	168.44	123.49
Prosperous	116.58	97.64	139.89	117.17
Rathangan	38.00	31.77	45.61	38.13
Sallins	42.73	35.74	51.27	42.89
Straffan	291.48	233.08	349.77	279.69

The table above, taken from the last Open Space Strategy in 2011, shows completely inadequate levels of open space existed in both Allenwood and Derrinturn and this remains unchanged today in 2020. The 2011 strategy advised that lands be purchased in Allenwood, Derrinturn and Ballymore Eustace to address the situation. The areas were identified as 'Priority One', ahead of all other villages in County Kildare, in terms of open space needs.

The Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Strategy for 2021 - 2031 must be more aggressive in addressing this identified lack of open space for these villages, in the form of an action stating the intention to immediately acquire the necessary lands. This needs to be stated as a strategic aim of the council specifically for the villages of Allenwood, Ballymore Eustace and Derrinturn.

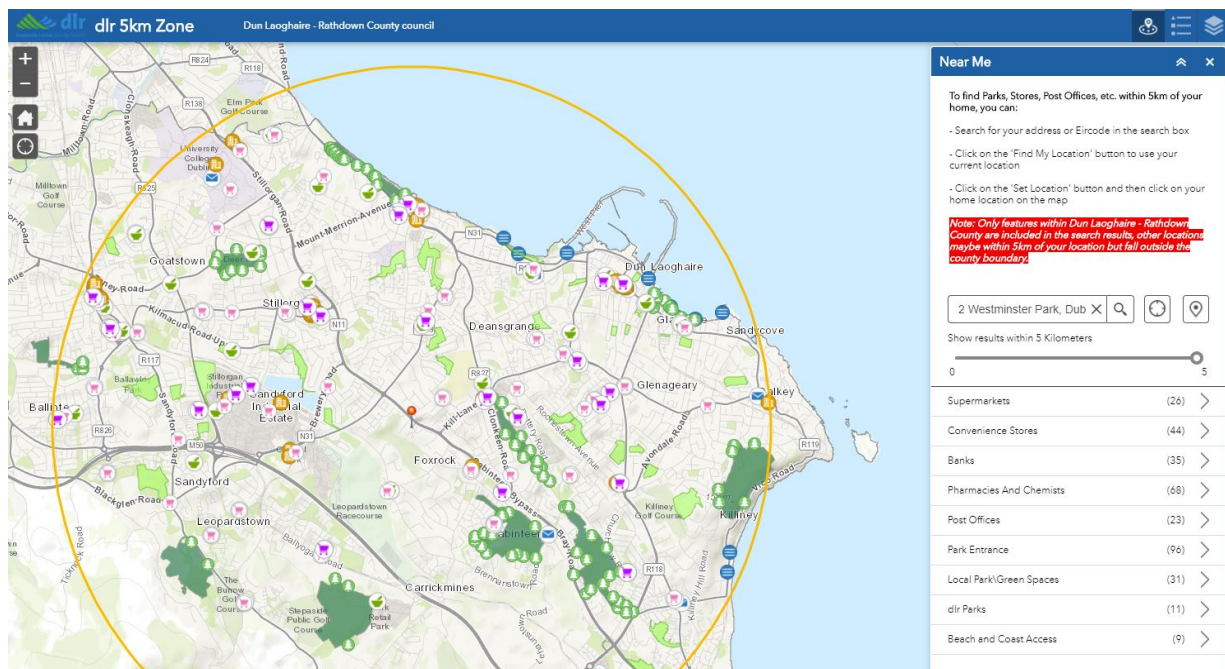
Map Open Spaces & Outdoor Recreation Areas

I recommend that the strategy include an action to provide a digital map of online spaces and areas of recreation in the county of Kildare.

For example, see the system that Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council already has in place at:

<https://dlrcocouncil.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=512f99f378754f40bf3d60d0549cf194>

As well as providing information on the available open spaces for the public, the map could be used to plan pedestrian and cycle links between settlements and recreation areas.



Link the Greenways and Blueway to Settlements

I recommend that the strategy should include an action to map out the greenways and blueway on the Royal and Grand Canals, and plan future cycle and pedestrian links to the greenways and blueway from local settlements.

The greenways and blueway would be mapped on the online map described in the previous recommendation, and proposed links would also be identified and marked on the map and then included as objectives in the county development plan or local area plans as appropriate.

A good example of the need to identify a link to the Grand Canal Greenway is Allenwood, where there is no safe access to the Grand Canal to the south of the village and this was not considered by the Part 8 for the Grand Canal Greenway, despite the canal being explicitly identified as the primary amenity for Allenwood in the 2011 Open Space Strategy.

The next iteration of Local Area Plans for settlements close to the greenways and blueway will need to include planning for appropriate linkages, and the Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Strategy should be able to inform the decision making for those LAPs.

Car Parking for Greenway and Blueway Access

It is recommended that the strategy includes an action to assess the parking needs for open spaces and outdoor recreation areas, to include the greenways and blueway.

Careful selection of designated car parking areas should be given some consideration. Some communities are not within walking or cycling distance to blueways and greenways and other amenities.

There are already unofficial car parking spots at many canal bridges and these need to be either officially designated as such, or otherwise closed off as necessary. Again, the designated car parking areas would be marked on the online map.



Maintenance of Greenway and Blueway Roads

It is recommended that in the strategy, the council commits to leading the work to maintaining those sections of the greenways and blueway that consist of private roads, in the interest of recreation and tourism in our county.

Some sections of the greenways and blueway consist of private roads. An example is the initial stretch of the Barrow Blueway from Lowtown Marina to Littletown Bridge. It is in a poor state and presents a very bad first impression for visitors experiencing the Blueway for the first time. Waterways Ireland have neither the expertise, nor the equipment, to maintain such sections of the canal side routes.

Waterways Ireland will need the support of Kildare County Council where sections of the greenways or blueways are private roads. The strategy should outline how the council

intends to work hand in hand with Waterways Ireland to ensure that those sections of the routes are funded and brought up to the necessary standard.

The council might also consider an ambitious but proactive long term strategy of taking in charge all private roads that form part of the greenways or blueway.

Community Based Projects

It is recommended that the council maintain a list of suitable projects to improve open spaces and outdoor recreation in preparation for future funding opportunities and that community groups are allowed to assist in that preparation where appropriate.

Many streams of Central Government Funding, such as the Outdoor Recreation Funding Scheme, can only be applied for by the local authorities.

Acknowledging the limited resources of the council to prepare applications for such schemes under tight application deadlines, the council should invite local community groups to submit proposals directly to them with the level of detail required to make a successful application in preparation and anticipation of future funding scheme announcements.

The council will then act on behalf of the community group by submitting the applications, in order to ensure that every advantage is taken of all potential central government funding opportunities.

Continue to grow Community and Parks Section

It must be a strategic objective of Kildare County Council to continue to increase the resources of the Community & Parks section to match the growing needs of the citizens.

We are behind in some areas of the county with regard to the availability of open spaces and playgrounds, not due to any fault of the current leadership of Kildare County Council, but because of a lack of foresight in past decades. There has been a much needed and very welcomed growth in allocated resources to Community & Parks in recent years and we have rapidly reaped the benefits of that growth with several new playgrounds and parks.

The section also plays a pivotal role in the important areas of Biodiversity and Environmental protection.

Whilst acknowledging the increase in staffing in recent years, the resources allocated to the Community & Parks section of Kildare County Council needs to continue to grow, to meet the continuously growing need for open spaces and recreational areas. There is very little resistance from local communities to the provision of open space and recreational areas in County Kildare and we are only limited by the level of resources we dedicate to this task.

Expansion of Public Realms Team

It is recommended that the strategy includes an objective to expand the hugely successful Public Realms Team.

The Public Realms team has been instrumental in obtaining central government funding for many public realms projects in recent years, including most recently, the new Prosperous Town Park & Playground. The outcome of localised town and village health checks organised by the team has been immense and needs to be extended to all towns and villages in County Kildare.

The council should make it a long term goal to resource this team to the level needed to ensure that full advantage of funding streams, such as the Town & Village Renewal Scheme, is taken. In terms of specific strategic goals, Kildare County Council should be ambitious and aim to submit at least one project in respect of every town and village in the county, for each round of the Town & Village Renewal Scheme.

Natural Play Areas & Biodiversity Hotspots

The strategy should outline an ambition to support the creation of Natural Play Areas and Biodiversity Hotspots on the green areas of residential estates by means of a support programme for community groups.

Many wide open green areas in residential estates could very easily contain tree planted biodiversity hotspots with simple natural play areas. Kildare County Council is in the perfect position to support community groups that wish to convert parts of the green areas in their localities in this fashion.

The council should outline a programme of supports that deal with the issues around insurance, planning, installation and maintenance of such areas. This could then empower local community groups that are gladly willing to do the groundwork and raise the necessary funds.

Full-time Landscape Architect

I recommend that the long term strategy for Open Spaces & Outdoor Recreation of Kildare County Council contains an objective to secure a full time Landscape Architect.

The number of parks, playground, green spaces and recreational areas in the county will only increase over time. In order to provide consistency, value for money and more efficient delivery of open space and green infrastructure projects it makes sense to have a full time position occupying this key role for Kildare County Council, rather than relying on external contracts and the associated tender process.

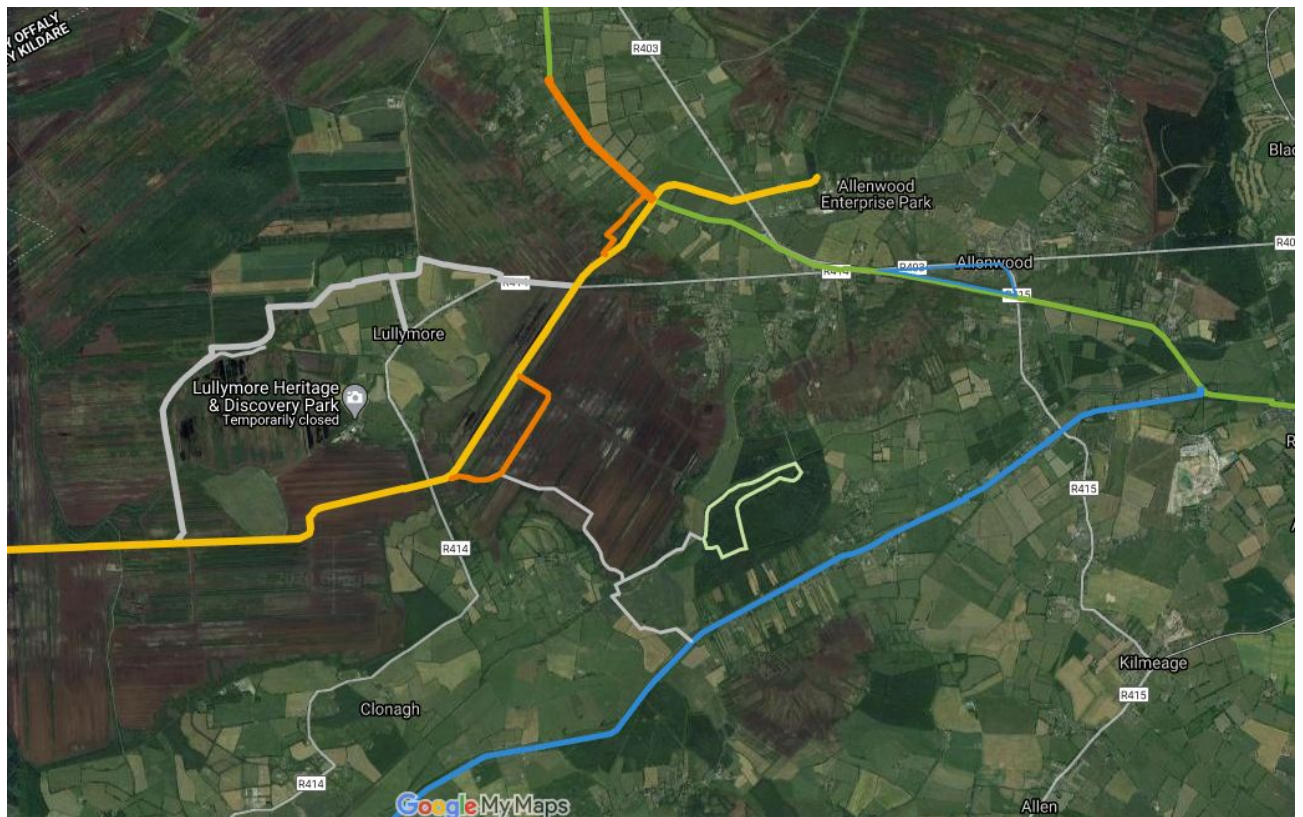
The architect would work hand in hand with the Heritage Officer, the Cycle Design Officer, the Public Realms Team and other members of the Planning and Parks departments, to help provide future open spaces and green infrastructure, as well as improving what we already have.

Countywide Walking Route Plans

The Open Space & Outdoor Recreation Strategy should clearly state that it is the intention of Kildare County Council to engage with all relevant stakeholders in the form of meetings with the objective of creating a countywide action plan for the linking up of all open spaces, blueways, greenways, biodiversity areas, recreational areas, forestries, woods, hills, trails, walkways and cycleways in County Kildare.

Kildare has a unique opportunity with regard to Biodiversity Tourism, given our blend of canals, peatlands, hills and woodlands, many with pre-made walking and cycling trails. The coordination and overall leadership needed to ensure that these trails are preserved, enhanced, linked to each other and marketed correctly must come from Kildare County Council.

As an example, the West Kildare region has seen many Biodiversity areas develop in the last decade, particularly around the Lullymore area. Several kilometres of trails and peatways loop around the surrounding area, many of which rely on the old industrial railway tracks, once used to transport peat out of the bogs. It is imperative that these trails remain open and accessible into the future and are opened up to a wider tourism market



The idea of preserving these walkways has been discussed and explored since the 1990s and a community effort is now underway to map, document and market the various routes as the 'West Kildare Biodiversity Trails'. We will also be consulting with the various stakeholders and landowners involved.

It is hoped that Kildare County Council would show the necessary leadership to encourage and assist with the development of this proposal, and others like it. This would help to take local knowledge and ideas to a level where they benefit not just local communities, but the wider communities of the county and beyond.



West Kildare Biodiversity Trails

A Draft Proposal on behalf of the
Communities of West Kildare

