

**The Chairman and Members of
North West Area Committee.**

Meeting: 12th December 2017

Item No: 12

Report to NWAC on Dublin City Parks Strategy 2017-2022

The Parks & Landscape Services Division are concluding their first Parks Strategy. The report is at draft final stage in advance of printing. The strategy in summary looks at the wide range of resources and services under the Parks Services portfolio and determines policy and arising actions under the vision of: *Growing towards a greener and more liveable Dublin.*

The process of preparing the strategy included an initial public questionnaire from which nearly 1000 responses were received and helped to inform the strategy work that followed. Internal strategy drafts were prepared leading up to the preparation of the Consultation Draft Report late last year. Consultation was undertaken online using the DCC consultation hub and approximately 300 responses were received which informed updating of the report to the Draft Final stage. The strategy comprises 6 chapters which are outlined below:

Chapter 1- Introduction:

The introductory chapter outlines the purpose of the strategy, the expected users, its vision and objectives and the methodology. The strategic vision is:

“ *Growing towards a greener and more liveable Dublin City*”

“The strategic vision of city parks and landscapes is to provide and enhance the experience of living in Dublin, working in Dublin and visiting Dublin through the provision of park resources and services befitting Ireland’s capital and its role as an international city”

Chapter 2- City Parks and Landscapes in Perspective:

This chapter relates the development of the city landscape over time from the original natural landscape centred on the Liffey, through the Viking & Norman period, medieval period, Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian eras and on to pre and post war periods to contemporary Dublin. The parks and landscapes that we have today help tell the story of the historical development of the city. The policy context in which Park Services operates based on international, European, national and local level policy is then reviewed.

This chapter also outlines the value of our city parks, which include their contribution to meeting the recreation needs and contributing to the good health of the population, contributing to the identity of the city, enhancing social and community interaction, providing environmental benefits, enhancing biodiversity and contributing to Dublin’s tourism economy. The chapter concludes with an international case study review highlighting some contemporary achievements including Singapore’s garden city vision, and New York’s One New York vision with a focus on revitalising its public spaces.

Chapter 3-The Public's View:

A public online questionnaire was created in advance of the main strategy work as part of the strategy's public consultation process and this chapter reviews the findings. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions to determine the views of the public on park resources and services. Just under 1000 responses were received and results include the importance of parks as a local community resource, the importance of providing a balanced range of facilities within parks, the issues that act as barriers to visiting parks, the importance of recreation as the key value of parks to the city, as well as a very positive view of engaging further with parks through volunteering. The objective of engaging with the public is expanded further in this chapter with a look at volunteering and contemporary communication through digital and wayfinding methods.

Chapter 4-Resources and Services:

This key chapter examines the full resources and services of the Parks & Landscape Services and includes parks and their recreational facilities, visitor facilities, natural areas and biodiversity, public realm, public housing, cemeteries, trees, civic decoration, allotments, planning and development control, art in parks and research.

Under the first chapter section a park typology is defined which categorises parks into Flagship and Community Parks. The quantity of parks (approximately 17% of the DCC administrative area) and their distribution is then analysed which indicates an unequal distribution. A key policy proposal of providing 2.5ha to 3.6ha area of parks per 1000 population is concluded.

Access to parks is then analysed and this indicates unequal access to flagship parks, relatively good access to community parks, and access to smaller sized parks in city central areas. Ways to address access and quantity deficits is outlined, including the provision of a series of new city centre parks themed on Dublin writers.

Recreational facilities (playgrounds, playing pitches, etc) are then analysed. Provision and access to facilities is discussed with requirements for the provision of additional facilities to be taken forward in discussion with sport governing bodies. The provision for play in the city is examined based on current distribution and prioritising new provision in areas where there is a deficit and a higher population of children.

Policy and action on park visitor facilities is reviewed followed by particular park management issues that were highlighted during the consultation process.

Dublin's natural areas and biodiversity form part of the urban ecosystem in which human activity dominates. Parks play a key role in providing natural areas and their proper management enables conservation and enhancement of biodiversity. The Biodiversity Action Plan, which is reviewed every 5 years, outlines our approach to biodiversity. Parks Services biodiversity section has a strong community engagement role with projects involving business organisations, schools and NGOs.

Parks Services provide input into enhancing the city public realm by building on the shared vision under the Dublin City Public Realm Strategy. Key projects include the completed Liberties Greening Strategy, the City Centre Masterplan and the Docklands Public Realm Masterplan.

Public housing remains a key issue for the City Council and Parks Services continue to play a role in design and implementation of the associated housing landscape provision including the current redevelopment of St Teresa's Gardens and Dolphin Estate.

Park Services manages and maintains a number of smaller closed cemeteries in the city that are somewhat hidden yet provide a curious insight into those who lived and contributed to the development of Dublin. The Jewish cemetery in Fairview and Huguenot cemetery on Merrion Row are monuments to two distinct communities, many of whom settled here to escape persecution in other countries. Appropriate interpretation of these graveyards will be a policy initiative under this strategy.

City trees, both in public and private management, form the urban forest which benefits Dublin by greening, carbon sequestration and urban beautification. Park Services manages public street trees and those within our parks. A new City Tree Strategy has now been prepared to comprehensively define city tree policy and present a five year action plan. Parks services are also active in promoting appreciation of trees in the city through tree trails and assisting with the annual National Tree Week.

Civic decoration in the form of flags, floral decoration and Christmas trees helps to bring vibrancy to Dublin and mark particular events. Development of further civic decoration through engagement with community and business groups forms part of the proposed policy of Park Services.

Allotments in Dublin have had a resurgence in popularity in recent years. The Division contributes in the provision and management of a number of allotments for public use as they are seen as a strong community building activity. The proposed policy under this strategy is to provide allotments subject to demand and to enhance overall coordination through the appointment of an allotment officer.

Landscape planning and development control is undertaken by Park Services through assistance given to the Planning Department on planning application assessments and Development Plan / Local Area Plan preparation. Industry consultation through the Irish Landscape Institute was conducted as part of this strategy and areas were identified that would help improve the planning application process including updating current guidance for landscape and arboriculture submissions.

Parks provide an outdoor gallery for art in the city and we are fortunate to hold over 30 sculptural artworks. Park Services in association with the Arts Office manages and promotes appreciation of art in parks. A comprehensive guide to the artwork was recently completed as well as a smartphone multi-lingual guide to the popular Oscar Wilde sculpture in Merrion Square. The proposed strategic policy includes the desire for more equitable distribution of public art across city parks and assessing the potential to create a Dublin City Sculpture Park.

Parks and Landscape Services uses and commissions research that directly contributes to its role in planning, designing, implementing and managing its resources. Current research includes conservation studies on historic parks as well as a Dublin Tree Canopy Study in partnership with UCD, the OPW and the other Dublin local authorities.

Chapter 5-City Landscape Plan:

This chapter presents a broader discussion of the city landscape under the headings of the coast, arrivals and departures, the inner and outer city landscape and city waterways. It sets out broader concepts for the city landscape and will act as a precursor to more detailed city landscape plans, which aim to bring these concepts to reality.

Chapter 6-Implementation:

In this concluding chapter all strategy policy is summarised and the implementation of proposed resulting actions are categorised into short (1-5 year) medium (5-10 years) and long term (10 years plus) actions. As this is the first parks strategy we expect that conditions and constraints affecting delivery of actions will change over time and this will be reflected in future strategy versions.

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