

11 Recreation and Amenity

Aim: To ensure the retention, provision and maintenance of accessible recreational and amenity facilities including parks and open spaces to meet the needs of the growing population of Athy.

11.1. Background

It is recognised that quality recreation and leisure facilities contribute to the quality of life for all that it serves. The provision of amenities which can cater for the demands of an increasing population and which can be accessible for all sectors and age groups is a central element in the delivery of sustainable communities. The Council recognises the important role that areas of amenity and green linkages play in creating quality and healthy environments for all and will seek to promote a balance between the protection of environmental assets and the facilitation of recreational use.

11.2 Strategy

It is proposed to strengthen communities through the provision of attractive recreation and amenity areas that meet the needs of the population of Athy. The Council seeks to protect the existing open space and amenity areas of the town area by retaining them under their current zonings. It is proposed to support the development of an Open Space and Green Network through the provision of increased linkages from adjoining land-uses. The Council will have regard to strategies and guidelines including the National Development Plan 2007-2013, the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines (DoEHLG 2009) and the Urban Design Manual, A Best Practice Guide (DoEHLG 2008).

11.3 Recreation

Quality recreation, leisure and amenity facilities have a fundamental impact on the quality of life in a town and on its social integration and

cohesiveness. Athy is relatively well served with a variety of clubs and organisations operating within the town and these provide a wide-range of active and passive recreational facilities. Some of these facilities include Athy Golf Club, Athy Gaelic Football Club, Hockey Club, Hurling Club, various Soccer Clubs, Rowing Club, Boxing Club, Tennis Club and Swimming Pool. Other important clubs in the town include the Drama and Musical Society, Athy Art Group, Irish Dancing Class, the South Kildare Beekeepers and the Youth Café. Athy also has an extensive amount of public open space with the People's Park in the east of the town, the town council owned land to the north of the town centre where the new swimming pool now operates and the area of land along the banks of the river and canal. While Athy has a lot to offer in terms of recreational amenities, anti-social behaviour has proved problematic over the years, therefore requiring the provision of palisade fencing around various recreational areas as a means to preventing and minimising such behaviour.

It is the policy of the Council:

- R 1: To encourage the provision, improvement and expansion of more varied recreational and sporting facilities to serve the needs of the town;
- R 2: To encourage recreational and amenity facilities to be multi-functional and not used exclusively by any one group.
- R 3: To encourage and promote the provision of pedestrian, cycle routes and networks linking parks and open spaces to residential developments so as to facilitate recreation and amenity activity, where feasible
- R 4: To safeguard existing leisure, recreational facilities in Athy town and encourage the provision of new facilities

for community use in new areas, or in areas where an identified shortage of such facilities exist.

- R 5: To facilitate the provision of sports and community facilities on Council owned land north of the Town Centre in a co-ordinated manner ensuring accessibility and usability by all members of the community.
- R 6: To seek to develop in conjunction with Kildare County Council, a county play and recreational and amenity strategy.
- R 7: To support Kildare Sports Partnership and encourage participation in sport and recreation in Athy through strategic placement, planning, refurbishment and management of new and existing facilities.
- R 8: To promote active amenity sports along the River Barrow and the Canal.
- R 9: A study will be carried out to explore the feasibility of developing a marina within the town area. This study will examine the need for the marina in light of a “do nothing” context, a range of sizes, locations and adjoining uses. Any development proposed in light of this study will be subject to EIA and Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.

11.4 Amenity

High quality accessible parks and open spaces and greenways provide health benefits for all including space for children to play, a meeting place for people and communities and can provide for the development of safe and attractive walking and cycling routes.

The Grand Canal and the River Barrow provide for attractive walking routes and amenity areas for passive recreation as well as boating and

fishing opportunities within the town. There is a great potential for waterways tourism in Athy where the Grand Canal and the Barrow meet. The development of a Marina would encourage greater usage of the Canal and River by boat users and promote Athy's waterways for recreational use. There are a series of walkways along Athy's Waterways that enhance the amenity value of the area. These walking routes are denoted on Map 11.1 Open Space and Green Routes.

A project was recently undertaken in conjunction with Bord Failte Ireland to promote the heritage trails within Athy. Three routes were identified and directional signposts, orientation signs, plaques and panels were erected highlighting all aspects of the town's heritage, Map 11.2. Further to these routes, Sli na Sláinte which stands for ‘paths to health’ have a designated walking route also in Athy. The route comprises a 2.6km ring which begins at the Courthouse adjoining the River Barrow.

With the increased focus on the town's waterways, opportunities exist to improve the quality of the open spaces along the banks of the Canal and the River Barrow to develop the amenities provided by the town's unique location specifically adjoining the Canal at Flinters Field in the north east of the town and the area west and south of Emily Square.

It is the policy of the Council:

- A1: To continue the development of riverside and canal side walking routes with the creation of a linear park along the River Barrow and canal in conjunction with the relevant statutory bodies.
- A 2: To continue the amenity development of the People's Park and to retain its enclosed urban park character.
- A 3: To maintain and develop the amenity potential of the canal for recreation.

- A4: To ensure that any future development along the Canal and the River provides walking routes and does not disproportionately affect their amenity value.
- A5: To promote an increased awareness of Athy walking routes and heritage trails as attractive and unique recreational and educational amenities.
- A6: To protect and improve all existing rights-of-way and to create further rights-of-way where necessary and appropriate.
- A7: To facilitate, where practicable, the provision of cycle-ways or walkways along the extent of the canal, in co-operation with landowners, Waterways Ireland and DoEHLG. Any proposed cycling or walking routes along the Grand Canal and River Barrow will be subject to a feasibility study and Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.
- A8: To support the conservation and development of local angling waters and associated infrastructure required to advance the sport in the town. Any proposed restocking will be carried out in consultation with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and in co-operation with Inland Fisheries Ireland. Any proposed works, including infrastructural works will be subject to Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive."

11.5 Parks and Open Spaces

Open spaces are a vital part of the urban environment. Open space amenities create benefits not only for the enhancement of the quality of life of residential areas but also provide opportunities for recreational activities, ecological and environmental preservation as well as education. The Council is responsible for

the maintenance and management of a number of open spaces and amenity areas in Athy. The planning process plays a vital role in ensuring that existing parks and open spaces are protected and enhanced. In addition it is key to the provision of appropriate, high quality additional parks and open spaces to cater for increased demand as new residential areas are developed and the population increases.

Athy contains a range of sizes and types of open spaces which are accessible to the public. The land use zoning map 16.1 outlines the areas for Open Space and Amenity in the town. These areas include lands which are in public and private ownership and consist of a variety of sports clubs, the People's Park and the open space area north of Barrack Lane. These areas in are in addition to approximately 49ha of land zoned for open space and amenity purposes throughout Athy.

An Open Space Strategy was completed for County Kildare in 2010. The strategy identified a hierarchy of open space for the county, provided an audit of open space based on this hierarchy and assessed current and future open space needs within the county. The strategy noted that there is an adequate diversity of public open space throughout Athy including one neighbourhood park, two local parks and small areas of amenity green-space throughout the residential areas of the town. The recommendations arising from the strategy have been taken into consideration in the policies and objectives outlined below. The open space area to the north of the town centre is largely undeveloped therefore it is proposed to intensify the usage of this open space area with the intention of developing a town park and providing a range of sports and community facilities in a coordinated manner. The provision of such facilities will benefit both schools and residential areas located to the north of the town which will maximise the usage of such facilities. The provision of a new footbridge across the Barrow at this point will further increase accessibility to these services. A landscape

management plan for this area will seek to enhance the amenity value of this open space.

11.5.1 Strategic Provision of Open Spaces

The Council seeks to establish a hierarchy of open space for various categories of the population and provide a situation whereby every resident in the town lives within a comfortable walking distance, e.g. 10 minutes of a range of open space types such as formal parks and children's play areas. The Department of the Environment 'A Park's Policy for Local Authorities' (DoE 1987) recommends that amenity areas be provided in a 'Hierarchy of Parks' based on population units of 10,000. This policy recommends a neighbourhood park of about 16 ha or 40 acres and two local parks within a specified distance of the population to be served.

The Guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (DoEHLG 2009) recognize that assessing open space on a population basis can be difficult due, inter alia, to the unpredictability of occupancy rates. Town centre development will be unable to achieve the same public open space provision as suburban sites. These factors will be taken into account when planning open space provision. Large areas of open space should be located adjacent to existing or proposed neighbourhood centres, community facilities and educational campuses in order to facilitate multi-purpose use, to meet a variety of needs and thus be able to fulfill a range of functions.

The development of a Green Network for the town is important in developing a hierarchy of open space areas. Green Networks function as long distance walking and cycling routes as well as ecological corridors. This plan seeks to create greater linkages between the existing and future green infrastructure generally in accordance with Map11.1 Open Space and Green Network.

It is the policy of the Council:

- OS1: To develop and facilitate the provision of public open space generally in accordance with "Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas-Guidelines for Planning Authorities" (DoEHLG, 2009) and with the 'Kildare Open Space Strategy'
- OS2: To facilitate and encourage a series of high quality open spaces throughout the town, preferably as part of a larger linked network that is available to all ages and accessible to everyone, including people with mobility impairments.
- OS3: To retain open space lands with established recreational uses.
- OS4: To preserve, manage and maintain to a high standard the existing parks and open spaces in the town.
- OS5: To encourage the provision of open space for both passive and active recreation to serve the needs of the town's existing and future population concurrent with new residential development.
- OS6: To protect lands zoned Open Space and Amenity from inappropriate development, to provide for public access for recreational purposes, and to facilitate nature conservation in these areas

11.5.2 Allotments

An emerging new form of land-use has been the development of allotments. Allotment gardens allow a number of people to cultivate their own vegetables in individual plots/land parcels on lands owned by another individual or body. The size of a plot/parcel ranges between 200-400sqm and often the plots include a shed for tools and shelter. The gardeners are usually organised in an allotment association which leases the land from the owner which may be a

public/private entity. Allotments can have a number of benefits including the promotion of healthy lifestyles, biodiversity and providing a cheaper local and sustainable source of food.

It is the policy of the council:

- AL1: To encourage and facilitate the development of allotments of an appropriate scale which meet the following criteria;
- (i) The lands are appropriately situated within or immediately adjacent to the edge of the town;
 - (ii) The lands are easily accessible to the residents of the town; and
 - (iii) Adequate water supply and adequate bicycle and car parking facilities can be provided'.

11.5 Recreation and Amenity Objectives

It is an objective of the Council:

- RAO1: To support the development of a quality open space area to include the provision of sports and community facilities on Town Council owned land north of Barrack Lane (Refer to Map 11.1)
- RAO2: To carry out a Landscape management plan for the open space area to the north of Barrack Lane containing a detailed planting, landscaping and maintenance programme for the area. This landscape plan should address issues such as:
- The need for attenuation ponds
 - Street furniture including lighting, seats and bins
 - Pedestrian and Cycle facilities
- New planting and management facilities
- RAO3: To facilitate the provision of secure bicycle locking facilities at the People's park.
- RAO4: To investigate developing Lord's Island as a Wildlife amenity area open to all members of the community.
- RAO5: To support the development of a linear walkway along the banks of the Canal and River Barrow. Any proposed cycling or walking routes along the Grand Canal and River Barrow will be subject to a feasibility study and Appropriate Assessment in accordance with Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive.
- RAO6: To undertake a feasibility study to determine the most appropriate location for a skateboard park.
- RAO7: To continue landscaping and maintenance of amenity areas.
- RAO8: To provide and develop walking and cycling routes throughout the Town, particularly ones linking various areas of public open spaces and amenity in accordance with Map 11.1
- RAO9: To continue to maintain existing open space areas within housing developments, which have been taken in charge by the Council.
- RAO10: To implement the recommendations of the Kildare Open Space Strategy as appropriate.