



Skerries Cycling Initiative (SCI) is a committee of the Skerries Community Association and a member of Cyclist.ie.

## Consultation on: Keeping it Green - An Open Space Strategy for Fingal

<https://consult.fingal.ie/en/chapter/keeping-it-green-open-space-strategy-fingal>

Submission from Skerries Cycling Initiative (SCI).

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## Introduction

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the formation of a strategy for open spaces in Fingal.

We note the vision and objectives of the strategy and believe our submission will contribute to creating a final strategy which fulfils both the vision and objectives.

Our submission takes account of the findings and recommendations relating to Skerries in the Malahide-Skerries Cycling Study (2009) commissioned by Fingal CC from Sustrans/ Colin Buchanan. There are many recommendations relating to publicly owned open space in the Study which, if implemented, would provide residents with meaningful and safe options for more active travel. See <http://www.skerriesca.com/2015/01/15/2009-cycling-study>

There are two distinct types of open space referred to in the draft strategy:

A. Open spaces in housing estates

B. Parks.

We have structured our submission to deal with each separately while recognising that the sustainable development and management of both types of open space are necessary to achieving the stated vision and objectives.

### **A. Open spaces provided in housing estates as multipurpose amenity and play areas.**

1. In many housing estates there are large areas of open space and we advocate the use of such multi-functional open spaces to increase opportunities for active travel within towns and neighbourhoods for people of all ages and abilities whether walking or cycling, using wheelchairs, mobility scooters and adapted/recumbent cycles. The provision of well designed paths should not interfere with the usage of the open space for formal and informal recreation but should improve accessibility and usage for all. Promotion of open space usage including signage can make it clear that pedestrians have priority and good design will enable all users to have good line of sight and room to interact safely with other users.

#### **Existing bye-laws – an obstacle to achieving objectives**

2. Under the current bye-laws it is forbidden to either cycle, skateboard, roller skate, roller blades on open space. The application of the bye-laws to residential open space in the same manner as they are applied in regional parks is in our view, inappropriate. There may be good reasons to start from a restrictive standpoint for certain activities in regional parks such as Ardgillan or Newbridge (although for several years cycling has been permitted on designated paths in both of these parks) but we think that residential open spaces should be governed by a less restrictive approach and the new strategy should embody this. Where local neighbourhood open space is concerned the default position should be to allow activities unless there are clear reasons to prohibit them.

#### **Benefits of a less restrictive approach**

3. Allowing people to cycle, skate etc on residential open space means:

- children are provided with a safe space in which to practice these activities
- parents have a safe place to teach their children to cycle (or learn themselves)
- independent mobility for people with disabilities is supported in a practical way.
- neighbourhoods are made more permeable for walkers and cyclists enabling people to travel to schools, shops, bus stops, railway station, sporting amenities using segregated routes, quiet roads and controlled crossings.
- social interaction is encouraged between neighbourhood residents.

In our view the new strategy should adopt a supportive approach to people cycling, skating etc at appropriate speeds with priority being given to more vulnerable users. Restricting these activities should only be considered when safety is an issue or where a nuisance is being created and can't be removed by other, less restrictive, means.

A document prepared by Laois Planning and Transportation Strategic Policy Committee <http://www.laois.ie/media/Media,3531,en.pdf> includes examples of well designed open space:



*Plate 7: Centrally located open space provides for good surveillance, while an encircling foot-path provides for pedestrian and cyclist usage*



*Plate 8: A well lit and hard landscaped pedestrian/cycle route separate from the main roadway*

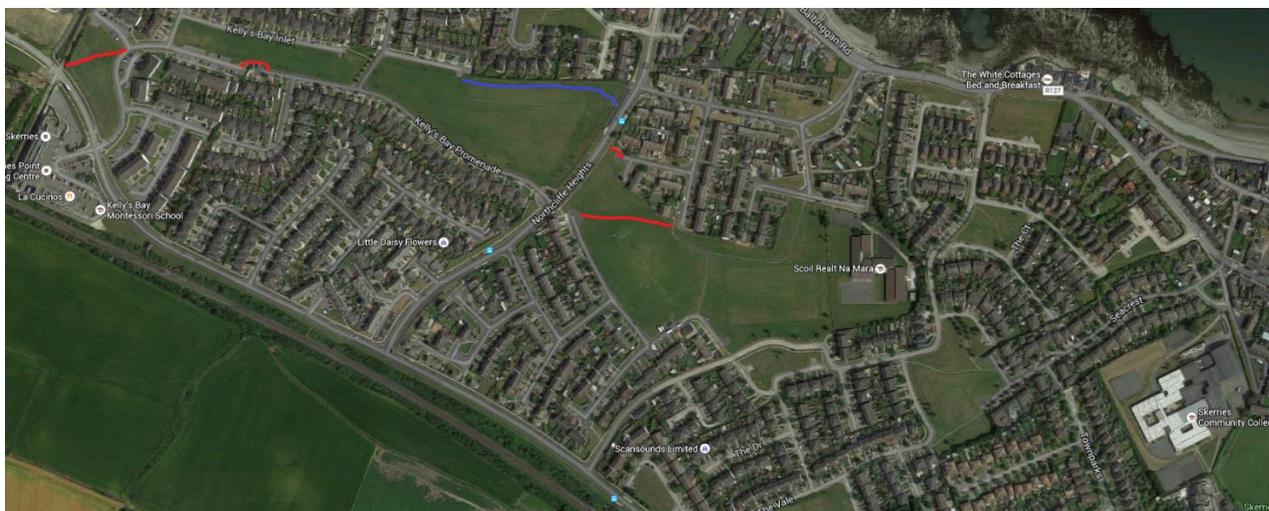
Many of the ideas discussed in the Laois document could be applied all over suburban Ireland.

### Potential for increasing active travel in Skerries

Skerries is fortunate in having copious amounts of open space in many of its housing estates as well as in the centrally located Townparks. Using this green space to build safe routes to local schools and amenities and enabling adults and children to build their cycling confidence will promote a more active and healthier community. Safe routes will also enable persons with mobility aids including wheelchairs and battery powered scooters to move around their neighbourhoods in comfort. Two specific proposals for safer active travel routes are outlined below.

*Linking open spaces between Realt na Mara School, Skerries Educate Together/Skerries Point Shopping Centre and surrounding housing estates*

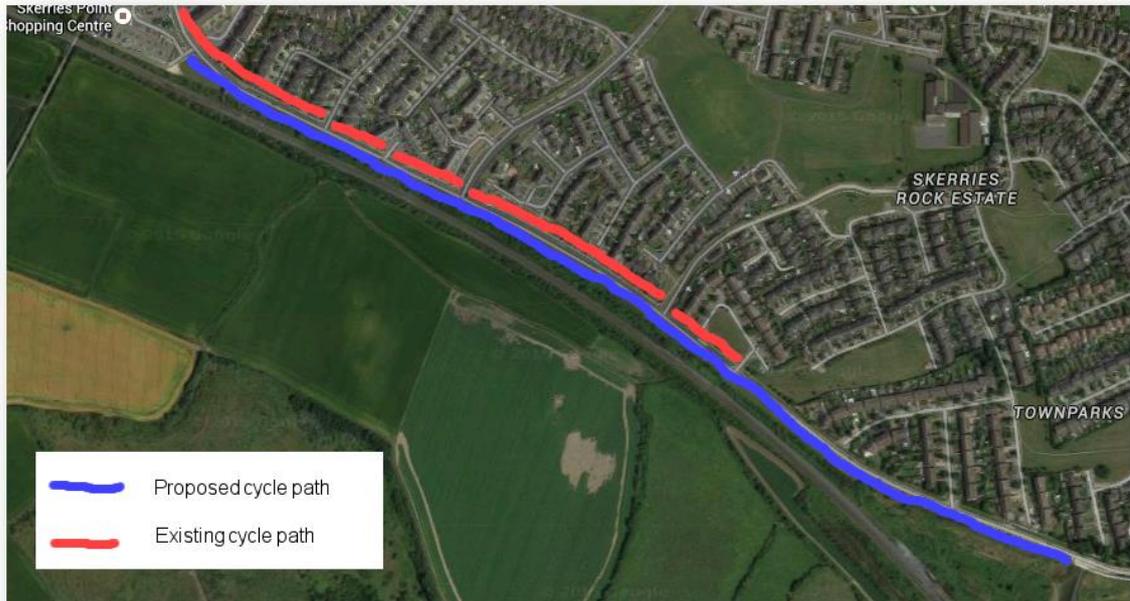
Blue line shows (top centre) recently built path. The red lines are suggested new path sections to link with existing paths and residential roads to create extended safe routes.



Four substantial open green spaces (running from top left to centre of above view) are surrounded by dense housing (Skerries Rock, Mourne View and Kelly's Bay). Three roads intersect the three spaces, two of which are in Kelly's Bay (relatively quiet roads) and the other, Northcliffe Heights (busier road) has ramps (and a "Lollipop Lady" on school days). With additional paths, safe walking and cycling routes to schools, shops etc could be developed without interfering with existing usage of the green open space. Where paths meet footpaths and roads, safe crossings would, of course, need to be designed and put in place for cyclists and other vulnerable users.

At the southern end there are further residential areas (Selskar, Seacrest and Townparks) with quiet roads and further open spaces, some of which are crossed by paths. These provide quiet routes to Skerries Community College and Skerries Harps grounds, emerging at the Texaco garage on the Dublin Road which is directly across the road from Skerries Community Centre and Town Parks, for which a Masterplan was recently agreed. Again with minor works such as dishing and safety barriers these paths could be made part of a network giving options for safer active travel to all.

- (ii) *Distributor Road –from Ballast Pit Path (Skerries railway station) to Skerries Point Shopping Centre.*



The breaks in the red line on the map above show the intersections that have to be negotiated when cycling or walking on the eastern side of the road compared with the unbroken path (blue line) that would be possible on the western side. This linear green strip runs in an unbroken stretch between the Ballast Pit Path and Skerries Point Shopping Centre. As traffic and parking on the Distributor Road increases, there is a growing need for a safer route for people who cycle to either the railway station or the GAA pitch or cycle to Educate Together.

#### Start building an active travel network in the town

The two modest proposals outlined above would be the first steps in creating a network in Skerries which would improve mobility options for young and old by optimising use of open space and residential roads.

#### Note on recently constructed path in Kelly's Bay open space.

Some existing residential open spaces have paths. In almost all cases the paths are not dished to enable users other than pedestrians to move safely between path and road. Very recently (September 2015), a pathway was constructed on open space in the Kelly's Bay area (from Kelly's Bay Strand to Northcliffe Heights Road along the eastern side of a large open space). The path is welcomed but we note that at both ends there is no dishing to assist access. At the Northcliffe Heights end in particular steep kerbing along the footpath makes it difficult for prams, mobility scooters, as well as bicycles to access the new path from the on-road cycle lane. This should be addressed in the interests of safety and comfort for users.

## B. Parks

Improving bicycle access within, to, and between Fingal's Regional Parks will help Fingal County Council achieve its objectives for its open space strategy.

### Open Space Value

The health, social, economic and environmental benefits of open spaces will all increase when Fingal County Council provides bicycle access to all of its Regional Parks:

- **Health** – Walking or riding to a Regional Park – whether you are coming from home, from the nearest railway station, or as part of walking or riding the Fingal Coast and Castle Way component of the East Coast Way – has obvious health benefits compared to putting your bicycle on your car and then driving to the Regional Park.
- **Social** – Cyclists like to ride in groups, and Fingal's Regional Parks will be better and more popular destinations for group rides when there is safe, signposted bicycle access to the parks.
- **Economic** – Bicycles are less damaging to roads than cars are, so a shift to bicycle access to Regional Parks will mean fewer potholes that Fingal County Council has to pay to repair. Secondly, human-powered vehicles need fuel, and we've all seen the bicycles of Sunday-morning cyclists lined up outside cafes as their owners pause to refuel: increasing the number of cyclists riding to the parks will increase the number of cyclists frequenting the cafes of the Regional Parks.
- **Environmental** - The environmental benefits of increasing the proportion of bicycles compared to cars accessing Fingal's Regional Parks are obvious.

### Open Space Quantity

The explanation for this objective states:

Connecting our urban open spaces and the surrounding more rural open spaces to each other and to the communities around them will achieve a wide range of social, health, economic and environmental benefits.

Connecting the Regional Parks by road does not achieve these benefits for the communities around the Regional Parks. When Fingal County Council increases the utilisation of the Regional Parks, if the increase comes at the cost of more cars travelling through Malahide, Lusk, Ballyboughal, Skerries, or Balbriggan, or of more cars clogging the junctions and roads to Donabate, then the social, health, and environmental amenities of those communities will decrease, and the economic cost to Fingal County Council of maintaining the roads will increase.

If, instead, Fingal County Council provides walking and cycling ways connecting the Regional Parks to railway stations and to each other, then the social, health, economic, and environmental aspects will all improve as the number of walkers and cyclists increases.

## Open Space Quality

The explanation for this objective is:

This Strategy will outline how open space improvements will be programmed to enhance their quality and utility and will focus on improving access to and within open spaces.

The way to improve access to the Regional Parks that increases their quality and utility is by providing walking and cycling access to the parks. Providing new ways to access the parks will increase their utility, and making it possible for people to leave their cars at home will increase the quality of their experiences and of the other park users, since those users will experience less congestion on the access roads and in the car parks compared to if increased utilisation comes only from increased visits by cars.

The current practices in Regional Parks of using grassy areas as overflow car parks does nothing for their quality. Fingal County Council should increase access by walkers and cyclists so that the open spaces are used by people, not cars.

## Sustainable Open Space

Bicycles do far less damage to roads and require far less parking space than do cars, and walkers do minimal damage to paved tracks and require no parking spaces other than the occasional park bench. Providing and promoting access to the Regional Parks by walkers and cyclists will allow Fingal County Council to make better and more sustainable use of resources compared to an increasing park utilisation that leads to increasing numbers of cars on access roads and in ever-expanding car parks.

## Conservation and Protection

It will be hard to protect the natural and man-made heritage in the Regional Parks if increased utilisation leads to more area being given over to car parks.

Improving walking and cycling access to the Regional Parks will do more to help Fingal County Council achieve its objectives than will any plan that simply increases the number of cars in the Regional Parks. A co-ordinated strategy that provides walking and cycling routes that link the Regional Parks to each other – in the manner of Fingal County Council's initiative for Broadmeadow Way that will link Malahide Demesne and Newbridge House – will further increase their utility for and utilisation by walkers and cyclists. Fingal County Council can also link this with priority Government initiatives such as the East Coast Way. This approach would also be in tune with the actions and aspirations set out in the recently published tourism strategy: *Destination Fingal Tourism Strategy*

<http://www.fingalcoco.ie/media/Fingal%20Tourism%20Strategy%202015-2018.pdf>