
Executive Summary

Many of our fondest childhood memories are of playing freely in the natural environment; discovering the wonders of nature, building dens, climbing trees, overcoming challenges and forming friendships with no care for the holes in the knees of our trousers. Fingal County Council recognises its responsibility to facilitate its youngest residents in exercising their fundamental human right to play as established by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1992) and that through playing, particularly in natural environments, children benefit physically, socially and emotionally, form enduring memories and friendships and acquire a lifelong affinity for nature.

Currently however, children are faced with a decreasing range of opportunity for unstructured free play in the modern environment due, in part, to changed perceptions of what is considered a safe environment and the urbanisation of the population. Consequently, society is faced with the public health challenge of increasing rates of obesity in children. The Irish Heart Foundation (2019) A Childhood Obesity Manifesto states that “Obesity represents the greatest single threat to the health and wellbeing of our children” and that, in tandem with the availability and aggressive marketing of nutrient poor food and beverages, “Sedentary lifestyles often due to high levels of screen time and inadequate opportunities for physical activity” is one of the four main drivers of the increasing rate of obesity in children in Ireland.

This policy provides, in the form of best practice guidelines, a reference point for all stakeholders concerned with providing the highest quality play

environments in Fingal. The paramount consideration of the guidelines is that all play spaces should be inclusive and accessible, enabling children of all abilities to play side by side. From this understanding, the guidelines address the issues of the aesthetics of play spaces; the age appropriate nature of provision; opportunities for play outside of the playground; the assessment of risk in terms of a risk benefit analysis and the benefits of including natural elements within play spaces.

A model of play provision is presented in the form of a hierarchy of play spaces which details the recommended nature of play provision in relation to the location and demography in which the play provision is to be located. The hierarchy consists of four tiers of provision:

- (i) The Local Area for Play (LAP), intended for use by the youngest children and their carers, should be situated within a 1 minute walk from the home;

- (ii) the Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) provides for children who are beginning to venture independently from the home, younger children accompanied by carers, and older children and should be 5 minutes’ walk from the home;
- (iii) The Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play (NEAP) should be a 15 minute walk from the home and provide a broad range of play opportunity for older children and adolescents while being a focal point for the community at large;
- (iv) and the Destination Playground within a 20 minute drive from home and providing for young children to adolescents and carers on a larger scale and with a broad diversity of opportunities for play.

This policy forms the basis on which Fingal County Council will expand and maintain the space for play available to the children of Fingal by developing an equitable, county-wide play infrastructure that represents the needs of children as paramount in planning and development decisions. It will be a resource for all stakeholders involved in the delivery of play spaces for children and will facilitate the provision of spaces for play, of the highest quality, throughout the county. Fingal is committed to providing safe, accessible, inclusive, natural and engaging spaces for all our children to enjoy.