

## Chapter 5 Amenities & Open Space

### 5.0 Aim

To continuously improve the quality of amenities/public spaces and public approach roads in Birr. To strike a reasonable balance between the coordinated provision of population growth/urban development and the adequate provision of amenities and open spaces for the benefit of residents, workers and visitors.

### 5.1 Context

Current open space provision in Birr consists of the Camcor Linear Park including Mill Island, the town squares, a number of sports fields and various open spaces in the housing areas. In addition, the extensive lands at Birr Castle Demesne and Garden are a significant amenity for the town.

#### 5.1.1 Planning and Development Acts 2000-2009

Section 10 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 set out the mandatory objectives including the preservation, improvement and extension of amenities and recreational amenities.

#### 5.1.2 Birr Public Realm Plan 2009

The Birr Public Realm Plan 2009 includes specific objectives to further integrate open spaces into the existing built environment of the town. Also included in this study is direction towards making public squares and streets more people friendly, improving the appearance of approach roads to Birr town and Crinkle village and controlling the proliferation of advertisement signage.

### 5.2 Strategy

#### 5.2.1 Types of Open Space (Formal and Informal)

Open space can be in private or public ownership, with privately owned open spaces belonging to privately managed clubs and organisations and therefore often not readily open for public use. There are two types of open space, formal (passive) and informal (active):

- Formal open space (passive) has a relaxed setting for visual amenity purposes and provides space for walking, sitting and generally enjoying landscapes and nature (ecology, bird and wildlife habitat, plant species).
- Informal (active) open space or active recreational areas are designed for greater physical movement where sporting activities are usually being played, for example, football, hurling, golf, horse-riding, etc.

Both types of open space can be hard landscaped or soft landscaped. Soft landscaped open spaces provide a “breathing space” away from busy towns. Well-designed hard landscaped open spaces can provide a calmer more “people friendly” environment within a town.

#### 5.2.2 Hierarchy of Open Space

The Councils will continue to strive for a hierarchy of open space with the town and environs. This involves promoting a situation whereby every resident in Birr lives within a comfortable distance of a range of open space types such as formal parks and children’s playgrounds/play areas. Such a hierarchy would ensure that open space is distributed throughout the town. The overall aim is to achieve a high level of accessibility to all sectors of Birr’s population.

#### 5.2.3 Open Space in the Local Area-Based Strategies

Chapter 6, Local Area Strategies contains parts of the means of achieving a hierarchy of open spaces in Birr. Chapter 6 contains a clear strategy for the integration of public spaces both active and passive into the built environment. Existing and proposed land parcels within each ‘local area’ of the town and environs have been zoned open space in order to protect their amenity value and increase their accessibility. Map 5.1 highlights the areas of open space provided for in this plan area and proposed linkages/accessibility to same.

It is crucial that the built environment of a town appropriately overlooks open space for the purposes of creating ownership, preventing anti-social behavior and for overall greater accessibility and integration into the town. As referred to in Chapters 3, 6 and 8, it is the policy of this plan to ensure that **new development** directly overlooks public open space where feasible and appropriate. The design of open space should reflect the need to develop spaces that are practical, safe, accessible and attractive.

#### 5.2.4 Areas of High Amenity

It shall be Councils policy to protect and preserve Birr's "**Areas of High Amenity**" which overlay the three eskers within the town and environs (refer to Map 5.2 and Chapter 13: Natural Heritage and Landscape). It is noted that the esker to the north of the town has been badly damaged but that the majority of the Esker running between the town and Crinkle village is in good condition. This naturally formed "**buffer zone**" between **Birr town** and **Crinkle village**, is of local geological interest and of general amenity to walkers (refer to Map 5.1).

The Councils will seek the protection of eskers within the Plan area from further unnecessary degradation. Proposals for development upon or adjacent to eskers will be determined by reference to the need to conserve the character and scientific value of eskers and the extent to which the proposed development would be damaging to these qualities.

#### 5.2.5 Loss of Open Space

Only in circumstances where the quality and size of a given open space facility stands to be enhanced through relocation or improvement shall the loss of open space be considered. In such circumstances, the relocated/improved facility or amenity should retain a high level of accessibility to the entire town.

#### 5.2.6 Public Parks and Public walkways (Formal/Passive)

Existing public parks in Birr follow the meandering course of local rivers and streams running through the town (refer to Map 5.1). As highlighted in Chapters 6 and 13, it is an objective of the Councils to extend Camcor Park with the overall aim of creating a park network throughout the town and environs with high accessibility to the public. The Councils will continue to improve the quality of this park as resources permit i.e. lighting, landscaping etc.

#### 5.2.7 Playing Spaces/Sports (Active/Informal)

The types of playing spaces/sports areas in Birr are highlighted in Chapter 11. Birr's sport fields offer a tranquil "breathing space" from the urban environment and are important areas of recreational and sporting activity. Sporting fields in Birr will be protected as highlighted in Section 5.2.5 of this chapter. The relocation of such facilities is only justifiable where the facilities stand to be enhanced and expanded by relocation to an appropriate location in the town.

#### 5.2.8 Pedestrian Linkages/Permeability and Accessibility

Objectives BTEO 05-02 and BTEO 05-03 set out the Councils continued plans to further develop and extend the network of interlinked pedestrian routeways throughout the town and environs (also refer to Map 5.1). Having regard to the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, the Councils will continue to examine existing rights of way, paths, walking/cycling routes and access points (accessibility and permeability) to the Camcor Linear Park and other amenity areas.

The Councils will preserve and maintain suitable rights-of-way, create new ones where appropriate and promote their greater use in amenity areas. In order to link amenities and facilities, the Councils may seek the provision of pedestrian ways as a condition of planning permission. Where pedestrian routes are proposed, they must generally be directly overlooked by dwellings, be well lit and have boundary walls/ fencing not exceeding 1.2m height.

The above actions will further facilitate and promote the use of sustainable modes of travel for short trips within Birr as described in Chapter 8, Transport, Movement and Accessibility.

### 5.2.9 Walking Routes/Heritage Trail

Objective BTEO O5-04 sets out the Councils continued plans to further develop nature walks in Birr. Also, the Birr heritage trail visits all of the main attractions of Birr. The Councils will continue to support and upgrade infrastructure on these routes as resources permit i.e. lighting, footpaths, etc. and will seek to identify other walking routes/paths within the town and environs.

### 5.2.10 Cycleways

As highlighted in Chapter 8, cycling is an efficient and environmentally friendly manner of making short distance trips in and around Birr. Also, cycling is a recreational and sporting pastime in Birr. As part of the "*Cycle Network and Parking Study*" (refer to Chapter 8, Transport, Movement and Accessibility) the Councils will seek to integrate plans for a cycle network into the town's amenity routes including parks, paths and walks. Such a plan will benefit everyone in Birr, including tourists whom will be offered an alternative means of seeing the heritage and amenities of the area (refer to Chapter 9, Employment, Economy, Enterprise and Tourism).

### 5.2.11 Landscaping, Planting, Trees and Greenery

#### 5.2.11.1 Boundaries, Trees, Hedgerows, Traditional Stonewalls

Hedgerows, old stone walls and ditches are important visual elements and provide a rural corridor displaying a softened edge/urban fringe appearance on entry to Birr town and Crinkle village. Such features should be retained, where possible.

Protection of hedgerows where on the outskirts of Birr and Crinkle Village has the following advantages:

- Preserves the rural character of an area and softens the visual appearance during transition from the countryside to entry of Birr town and Crinkle village.
- Allow for instant screening of the site.
- Screening allows for wider choice of dwelling development style.
- Preserves natural habitats.

The unnecessary removal of hedgerows on the outskirts of Birr and Crinkle village has the following disadvantages:

- Exposes a site.
- Suburbanises what was a rural area.
- Can create an obvious ribbon of development.
- Landscaping of the site would be required to replace what was lost.
- Loss of biodiversity.

Having regard to development which is rural in nature and on the urban fringe of Birr town and Crinkle village, hedgerows and stonewalls should be retained or translocated within a development proposal where this protects or conserves the value or functions for which they are being retained, for example:

- a) Field pattern they reflect,
- b) Continuity of habitat as a wildlife corridor or
- c) The function is as a landmark or a habitat. Should this be unfeasible (in terms of public safety), proposals to replace with native species of local provenance is required.

There will be a presumption against the removal of mature hedgerows when there is a realistic alternative. The conservation of mature trees is also necessary and their presence enhances the overall aesthetic quality of an area. Where sites contain trees, a tree survey may be required that identifies all trees on the subject site and reports on their condition. This report should indicate whether such trees are proposed for retention and any works which may be necessary to the trees to allow them to grow without conflicting with the use of the land (for example, over shadow windows, have their root growth impeded to the extent that the tree may die and/or pose risk to human safety).

The Councils encourage the enhancement of the biodiversity in Birr and recognise that the planting of native trees and shrubs can contribute to this enhancement (especially on approach roads to Birr and Crinkle). For a full list of native trees and shrubs to County Offaly, refer to Chapter 14, Built Form and Urban Development Standards.

#### 5.2.11.2 Trees and Woodlands

<b>Table 5.1: Groups of Trees for Survey and Possible Protection under TPO's</b>	
(i)	Trees at Oxmantown Mall
(ii)	Trees along Riverside Walk
(iii)	Trees at Drumbawn
(iv)	Trees at Model School Road
(v)	Trees at Glebe Street
(vi)	Trees in Convent Grounds
(vii)	Trees in Johns Mall
(viii)	Trees between Crinkle and the town boundary

The Councils intend to uphold the amenity, educational and scientific value of trees and woodlands.

There are currently no Tree Preservation Orders within Birr. There are a small number of stands of trees which are attractive features of the town and important in their contribution to the town's visual setting and these will be examined over the plan period with a view to their preservation.

Notwithstanding the above, it is the overall policy of this plan to protect trees and tree groups within Birr that have significant value to the built/natural environment and consequently amenity value to the people of Birr.

The Councils will not normally grant planning permission for development which requires the felling of sound mature trees, save where it is absolutely necessary in the interests of safety (both for the development and for traffic) or the siting of development. In such cases, the Councils will require the developer to replant suitable trees and take steps to ensure their survival.

#### 5.2.12 Approach Roads

For visitors to Birr, the main first impressions are the approach roads, namely the Roscrea, Tullamore and Banagher public roads. The Councils recognise that these main approach roads require enhancement in order to improve and soften the "arrival experience" to Birr. The overall aim of any enhancement works is to make the entry to the town pleasant and welcoming. The Councils will have regard to the objectives relative to same within the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, which include:

- Landscape and greenery proposals (using species native to the area).
- Restrict proliferation of signage, particularly advertisement signage.
- Construct identity plaques/monuments/structures symbolizing Birr's past history.

Also the control of development resulting in ribbon development on un-zoned land within Birr environs will be implemented through the Development Management process.

## 5.3 Policy

### Open Space and Amenity

**BTEP 05-01** It is the Councils' policy to continue to strive towards a hierarchy of open space with the town and environs. This involves promoting a situation whereby every resident in Birr lives within a comfortable distance of a range of open space types such as formal parks and children's playgrounds play areas. Such a hierarchy will ensure that open space is distributed throughout the town.

**BTEP 05-02** It is the Councils' policy to make provisions for the reservation of land which will allow for the development of public open space and amenity provision, where practical and necessary, to ensure that residents and visitors gain the highest level of benefit from the environment of Birr.

**BTEP 05-03** It is the Councils' policy to protect formal and informal open spaces which contribute to the amenity value of Birr and in particular, act as functional "green buffers" creating "breathing spaces" within the plan area between urban/built land-uses (refer to Chapter 6: Local Area Strategies).

**BTEP 05-04** It is the Councils' policy to protect and preserve "Areas of High Amenity" in Birr, from development which would be visually obtrusive or which would detract from the intrinsic character and environmental quality of the landscape. The Councils will seek the protection of eskers within the Plan area from further unnecessary degradation. Proposals for development upon or adjacent to eskers will be determined by reference to the need to conserve the character and scientific value of eskers and the extent to which the proposed development would be damaging to these qualities.

**BTEP 05-05** It is the Councils' policy to ensure all new residential areas make provision for sufficient good quality open space, including the following principles:

1. Open space should be provided in a comprehensive manner and properly integrated into the proposed development and surrounding area with a design that is accessible, permeable, linked and overlooked by the receiving built environment.
2. Open space should be of a demonstrated recreational or amenity value and small dysfunctional open spaces should be avoided.
3. Wherever possible the majority of open space should be multifunctional. Areas of informal (active) amenity and children's play should be combined.
4. Areas should be easily and safely accessible from all dwellings which the space is designed to serve.
5. The design, location and appearance of open space areas should have regard to the amenities of nearby dwellings, for example, areas where children play should be overlooked by the fronts of nearby dwellings to provide for maximum surveillance and overlooking.
6. Public space should not be located so close to adjoining dwellings so as to cause undue noise or disturbance to existing or proposed residents.
7. Attractive natural features should be protected and incorporated into open space areas.

**BTEP 05-06** It is the Councils' policy to encourage the provision of private informal open space such as playing pitches and associated facilities where this can be achieved in accordance with the development strategy for Birr (refer to Chapter 3 and Chapter 6).

**BTEP 05-07** It is the Councils' policy to have regard to the following when considering development proposals for sporting facilities:

1. Compatibility with development plan zonings and local area strategies.
2. Impact on residential amenity.
3. Accessibility to its catchment population, priority to walking, cycling and public transport and traffic generation.
4. Impacts of noise and light pollution.

5. Impacts on the natural environment and archaeological features or built heritage.
6. High quality design respecting the character of its location

**BTEP 05-08** It is the Councils' policy to cooperate with sporting organisations who wish to expand or develop their facilities.

#### **Pedestrian Linkages/Permeability and Accessibility**

**BTEP 05-09** It is the Councils' policy to connect/interlink open spaces and amenity developments throughout the town so as to secure the integration of an accessible network of public spaces (refer to Map 5.1).

**BTEP 05-10** It is the Councils' policy to develop and extend the network of interlinked pedestrian routeways throughout the town (refer to Map 5.1).

**BTEP 05-11** It is the Councils' policy to extend the Camcor Linear Park with the overall aim of creating a park network throughout the town and environs with high accessibility to the public i.e. to extend Camcor Park to the town boundary and to link the Park to the Castle Demesne (refer to Map 5.1).

**BTEP 05-12** It is the Councils' policy to continue to designate and seek to protect long distance walking/cycling routes within Birr and participate in their development (also refer to Chapter 8: Transport, Movement and Accessibility).

#### **Landscaping, Planting, Trees and Greenery**

**BTEP 05-13** The Councils will require that all new development will respect the existing character of Birr environs, in particular through the provision of sensitive landscaping schemes. In the event that the removal of tree(s) is deemed to be necessary, it will be generally conditional on replacement with appropriate species. It is the Councils' policy that existing local landscape features, including mature trees, hedgerows, shelter belts and stone walls are **retained, protected and enhanced** where **appropriate**, so as to preserve the **local landscape and rural character of Birr and its environs**, whilst providing for future development. Where removal of a hedgerow, stone wall or other distinctive boundary treatment is unavoidable, provision of the same type of boundary will be required of similar length set back within the site. This shall also relate to Road Improvements and Realignments carried out by the Local Authorities or other agents on their behalf.

**BTEP 05-14** It is the Councils' policy to continue to improve and enhance the "arrival experience" to Birr by softening the visual appearance on each "public approach road" on entry to Birr town and Crinkle village.

**BTEP 05-15** It is the Councils' policy to promote the preservation and enhancement of native and semi-natural woodlands, groups of trees and individual trees.

**BTEP 05-16** It is the Councils' policy to discourage the felling of mature trees to facilitate development and to encourage tree surgery rather than felling where necessary.

**BTEP 05-17** It is the Councils' policy to protect the rural character of Birr environs from inappropriate development, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as part of the development management process.

## 5.4 Objectives<sup>1</sup>

### Open Space and Amenity

**BTEO 05-01** To protect the natural environment of the Camcor River and Little Brosna and their corridors through the town.

### Pedestrian Linkages/Permeability and Accessibility

**BTEO 05-02** To further develop and extend the following network of interlinked pedestrian routeways throughout the town and environs (refer to Map 5.1):

- 5A Extend the Linear Park from Camcor to Syngefield/Clonoghill.
- 5B Extend Linear Park from Mill Island to Castle Demesne.
- 5C Provide Pedestrian Way between Bridge St., and Castle St. via River.
- 5D Provide Pedestrian Link between the Linear Park and the Castle Demesne.
- 5E Preserve Mass path between Sandymount Lane and Clonoghill Lane.
- 5F Connect Love Lane to Housing estate from Camcor Park.
- 5G Preserve existing pedestrian paths and alleyway in the town centre area.
- 5H Investigate feasibility of reopening former pedestrian path linking Mill St. and Main St.
- 5J Provide additional pedestrian link between car park at Wilmer Road and Connaught Street.
- 5K Preserve pedestrian path at Mount Sally.
- 5L Investigate the possibility of extending Camcor Linear park to the east as far as Elmgrove Bridge and to incorporate into the Park the old Mass Path from Elmgrove Bridge as far as the town boundary and continuance of Riverside open space area.

**BTEO 05-03** To integrate plans for a network of cycle routes with plans for a network of amenity routes including parks, paths and walks (as part of the "*Cycle Network and Parking Study*").

**BTEO 05-04** To promote the protection and development of nature walks at:

- (i) Castle Demesne.
- (ii) Mass Path between Clonoghill Lane and Sandymount.
- (iii) Roscrea Road to Riverstown (Rock Lane).

### Landscaping, Planting, Trees and Greenery

**BTEO 05-05** To continue a programme of improving the "arrival experience" to Birr on the following "approach roads" to the town:

- Roscrea Road,
- Tullamore Road, and
- Banagher Road.

The Councils will have regard to the objectives relative to same within the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009, which include:

- Landscape and greenery proposals.
- Restrict proliferation of signage, particularly advertisement signage.
- Construct an identity plaque/monument/structure symbolizing Birr's past history.

**BTEO 05-06** To continue a landscaping/tree planting programme in Birr giving specific attention to public approach roads, the town's streetscapes/public squares and having regard to the objectives relative to same within the Birr Public Realm Plan 2009.

<sup>1</sup> The order of listing of objectives is not intended to indicate priorities. Subject to the availability of resources, it is the Councils' aim to monitor and accomplish the objectives listed in this section within the period of this plan.

**BTEO 05-07** To undertake a comprehensive tree survey of Birr and, where appropriate, to propose measures for their protection, for example:

- (i) Trees at Oxmantown Mall.
- (ii) Trees along Riverside Walk.
- (iii) Trees at Drumbawn.
- (iv) Trees at Model School Road.
- (v) Trees at Glebe Street.
- (vi) Trees in Convent Grounds.
- (vii) Trees in Johns Mall.
- (viii) Trees between Crinkle and the town boundary.