

GREEN SPACES FOR HEALTH Submission Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 August 7, 2020

Green Spaces for Health, is a community led initiative of Cork Healthy Cities and Cork Environmental Forum and is funded by Healthy Ireland. Our initial roll out of the project has been in the South Parish area of the city where we have partnered in particular with the Lantern Project, Douglas Business Association, UCC and many local residents. This collaborative style model is the basis of how we work with communities.

We are an eco-social organisation who recognise the benefits of nature to our physical and mental health and well being.

We run community gardening projects maintaining existing green spaces and seek out greening opportunities. We encourage and assist individuals and communities to grow food, trees and plants. Our work encompasses protecting biodiversity, creating new habitats, supporting green energy, mapping trees and recycling. We believe in the transformative power of coming together with others to build a resilient inclusive community. This informs all the work we do.

To see details of what work we have pursued in 2019/2020 please go to <https://corkhealthycities.com/greenspacesforhealth/>

"Research examining the health and public health benefits of access to green space is extensive and persuasive"^{1.3} *Health, Social and Environmental Effects of Urban Green Spaces, WHO Urban Green Space Interventions and Health. A review of impacts and effectiveness. 2017* <https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/environment-and-health/urban-health/publications/2017/urban-green-space-interventions-and-health-a-review-of-impacts-and-effectiveness.-full-report-2017>

GREENING OF CORK CITY

Where we mean greening to include parks, trees, public spaces, verges, rooftops, walls, roads, etc

"Urban Green Spaces Interventions need to be planned and designed with the local community and the intended green space users. This will ensure the derivation of benefits for the local residents and will aid the delivery of interventions that serve the needs of the community-especially in deprived areas." *WHO Urban Green Space Interventions and Health. A review of impacts and effectiveness. 2017*

At Parkowen in Cork City in 2019 Green Spaces for Health consulted with the local residents before working to regenerate the park. The area has been transformed from a place of anti social activity to a safe space for recreational use and biodiversity. Green Spaces for Health work with a volunteer gardening group to maintain the space in collaboration with the City Council parks workers. It is a successful project with a significant decrease in anti social behaviour, growing local participation and during Covid-19 lockdown Parkowen became a popular place for people to spend time in.

Action

- We propose that this successful partnership model is rolled out by the city council parks department to all areas across the city. We further suggest that it not be limited to parks but it

include all areas with potential for greening such as open greens, verges, cemeteries, residential parks, etc.

ACTIVE GREEN COMMUNITY BUILDING

Actions 1-2

- Provide land for the creation of community food growing gardens across all areas of Cork. There are many co benefits in growing food in a local community setting not least that it creates a resilient cohesive community. This will be especially important in times of food security problems caused by the climate emergency.
- Support through financial grants professional facilitation in community engagement using imaginative, experiential processes that empower communities to come together to identify their own particular needs and find solutions, examples of this type of engagement include local citizens assemblies.

RECLAIMING THE STREETS OF OUR CITY

Green Spaces for Health welcome the measures outlined in CMATS 2040 for reducing car use in the city. We welcome City Council's closing of certain strategic streets to traffic and are keen to support the increase in cycling and walking. ***"Urban Green Spaces should provide opportunities for meaningful activities such as play leisure, recreation or relaxation. These meaningful activities will be dependent on the needs and demographics of the users and could range from providing facilities for play or urban gardening to providing areas for social interaction or relaxation or reflection"*** 2.2.4 WHO Urban Green Space Interventions. A review of impacts and effectiveness. 2017

Actions 1-9

- Make accessible to the public live pollution monitoring, this will promote public awareness of the invisible dangers of pollution and strengthen the argument for removing cars from our city. See example from Cologne <https://aqicn.org/map/cologne/>
- Pedestrianise more streets not just in the heart of the city but in areas such as South Parish with special regard for children and older persons walking/cycling needs and with due regard for meaningful consultation with residents.
- De-pave sections or strips of pedestrianised streets for the planting of trees. Make the streets liveable social domains by installing public seating.
- Install child play areas where none currently exist, for example in South Parish where there is a growing young population there is no playground/dedicated play area.
- Ensure that ground level areas currently used as large car parking facilities can be repurposed for children's play areas, green areas and community outdoor amenities once the six park and ride hubs are established.
- Create more pocket parks <https://www.theparksalliance.org/small-is-beautiful-the-rise-and-rise-of-pocket-parks/>
- There is an urgency to explore alternative ways of dealing with our household waste/compost in Cork. We suggest a community based discussion on group collection/depots, chaired or hosted by City Council with a pilot trial in one small area of the city as a start, for example South Parish. Domestic bins on pavements are a hazard to pedestrians and we need to find a viable solution to replace them.

- Make it mandatory that all designs for new buildings in Cork include a green roof, wall, courtyard or appropriate significant green area commensurate with the size of the building for those working and living in them.
- To reduce drug related litter, public drug taking and other public order problems linked with open drug taking we suggest the City Council, HSE and other bodies discuss the potential merits of establishing a supervised injecting facility in Cork. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/primarycare/socialinclusion/homelessness-and-addiction/supervised-injecting-centre/>

TREES

'Urban and Suburban trees have direct benefits for residents' Research Review, US Forest Service Northern Research Station <https://www.fs.fed.us/nrs/news/review/review-vol26.pdf> 1-8. Trees are a critical element in supporting biodiversity.

"Support and enhance a native shrub and tree planting programme for Cork City in conjunction with an awareness campaign in the context of climate adaptation. The tree planting programme will include the protection of existing trees, increasing tree cover, identifying new sites for additional tree planting for the enhancement of the natural environment and biodiversity and the protection of trees on private land. Support the planting of native species." Objective 13.1 from Cork City Council Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/media-folder/environment/final-cork-city-council-climate-change-adaptation-strategy-30-sept-2019-.pdf>

Actions 1-9

- We call for a tree mapping audit to be conducted in all the different parishes across the city. This can be carried out by local people with training, or by schools and institutions.
- A tree audit provides data on how many trees we have, what type, where they are located and where there are none, etc. *For Example so far the tree audit of South Parish (80% complete) indicates that roughly 70% of the trees mapped are non native.* All trees are good but the balance between native and non native must be observed when planning what trees to grow in future. We need more native trees to support our native biodiversity.
- Install tree trails across the City, ensure at least one trail is entirely native. Have information of each tree species accessible by phone app. Potentially tie in with existing heritage sites, this action will increase biodiversity and provide more walking trails. See Dublin Park Tree Trails. <https://www.treecouncil.ie/dublinparksnativeirishtreetrails> *Doesn't have to be limited to parks.*
- It is understood that trees need trimming for health and safety purposes but we urge stop to extreme pollarding of trees, it is highly stressful for the tree, looks unsightly and hinders the natural growth of the tree. The benefits of trees lie largely in their canopy.
- Discontinue the spraying of tree bases with harmful chemicals. This is not necessary for older trees, younger trees need the grass cut around them.
- Create and consolidate wildlife corridors of trees and hedgerows. This involves urgently protecting what we have, enforcement of the law around the illegal cutting down of trees has to be implemented.
- Promote the rediscovering/identifying of native cork heritage apple tree species. Encourage the growing of fruit trees in areas where they once thrived in the city.
- Cork needs a lot more trees. Plant additional trees in public spaces, parks, cemeteries, etc. When a tree is knocked accidentally or dies the policy should be to replace the tree within a

reasonable time frame. There are several spots identified in South Parish where trees once stood but are no longer there.

- Protect and celebrate the cities heritage trees

BIODIVERSITY

"The alarming decline of most of our butterfly species since the 70s has accelerated in recent years." Butterfly Conservation Ireland. The same can be said of moths and other insects. "Over a third of Irelands 99 species of Bees are in danger of extinction." Oonagh Duggan of Birdwatch Ireland.

Actions 1-9

- Using the model of Green Spaces for Health referred to above in Greening Cork City create **active partnerships** between local nature groups who can steward biodiversity plots in parks and public spaces.
- *Green Spaces for Health appreciate the very informative page on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity on Cork City Council's Website but urge the council to go a step further and implement more widely the measures it advises.* <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/council-services/services/arts-culture-heritage/natural-heritage-biodiversity/Actions>
- Appoint a biodiversity Officer for Cork and adopt the *All Ireland Pollinating Plan for Councils* in **more areas** than is currently being practiced: https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Councils_actions-to-help-pollinators-2018-WEB.pdf
- Implement the ideas in Birdwatch Ireland's wonderful publication on swifts by financing a survey of swift activity in Cork City by an avian ecologist and installing swift boxes in appropriate City Council owned buildings. <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/media-folder/heritage/saving-swifts-booklet.pdf>
- Further Implement some of the Heritage Council's *Gardening for Biodiversity* in all public parks and other public areas maintained by the council. **Partner** with local gardening/ecological/voluntary groups in its roll out (as mentioned above) <https://www.corkcity.ie/en/media-folder/heritage/gardening-for-biodiversity-guide.pdf>
- Our waterways offer a tremendous asset for biodiversity and are an under-utilised opportunity for human interaction. The tributaries, streams and complex waterways that flow in Cork can be highlighted by selectively establishing pathways for public use with clear signage, maps and identifiers.
- Protect the rich biodiversity of these waterways
- Stop the use of **toxic chemicals** in public spaces, parks, cemeteries, roadsides, verges. It is harmful to our health and the health of our insects, pollinators and the soil. We acknowledge the exception to a blanket ban: Targeted injecting of invasive Japanese knotweed which is understood to be one of the few known ways currently to treat it. <https://www.thejournal.ie/dublin-city-council-wilding-5083456-Apr2020/>
- **High Temperature "blue-rich" light from LED** street lighting seriously impacts biodiversity and human health. Green Spaces for Health welcome the reduction of light energy and urge Cork City Council to follow best practice when replacing street lighting. *"We promote the adoption of lower temperature (warmer colour) lighting, which provides the best balance of cost saving, road and personal safety through better balanced light and improved perception, as well as reducing environmental impact. We encourage both "trimming" (part-night lighting) and "dimming" policies to reduce the light burden in the night-time environment and, at the same*

time, produce significant cost savings." Prof. Brian Espey, School of Physics, Trinity College Dublin https://www.darksky.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BestPracticesInPublicLighting_BEspey2020.pdf

This concludes Green Spaces for Health's submission

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