

Making Space for Teenagers in the Public Realm

Preliminary Report on the Teenage Study

with

Draft Recommendations

3rd May 2018

Introduction

South Dublin County Council commenced a consultation process with teenagers in 2017, which examines both active and passive recreational requirements for this age group. Background research was also carried out over the period to assess current level of provision for this group in the county.

This report presents the preliminary findings of the study to date and the draft recommendations. The report will be finalised following some further consultation outlined later in this document.

During the delivery of the 2014-2018 playspace programme for younger children by South Dublin County Council, an issue that repeatedly emerged was the need to carry out a similar programme of facility provision for teenagers. Anecdotally teenagers have a poor reputation when it comes to their use of playgrounds and other public places. When they hang out in playgrounds they are accused of loitering, of taking over and of rowdiness. A congregation of teenagers is frequently described as being anti-social when in fact it is just normal social interaction. Parents of younger children often view negatively groups of teenagers using playgrounds.

Part of normal adolescent behavior involves growing independence from ones family and increased contact with and influence by their peers. Teenagers require additional freedom outside their homes. However, unlike young children or older adults, teenagers have no obvious right to spaces of their own. They usually have nowhere else to go except outdoor public places including parks and playgrounds.

During consultations for the playspace programme SDCC often heard from teenagers who reported feeling harassed by adults wherever they went. They are often made to feel unwelcome in town centers, outside shops and in playgrounds and parks. They report feeling unwelcome sitting chatting in their own housing estates. Teenagers report that fast-food facilities and Shopping Centres are popular destinations for them as they give them somewhere to go, to see and be seen and allow them to congregate with their peers.

Survey Results

South Dublin County Council carried out a social media consultation process with content and paid advertisements targeted within the SDCC region aimed at 13-19 year olds. This multi-media campaign ran from the 10th of November 2017 to January 19th 2018. Approx. 500 submissions were received in that time frame.

(See Appendix A for Infographic on Survey Results)

The survey shows that teenagers *feel excluded* from many public places. They report *being unwelcome, feeling unsafe and being deterred by anti-social activity*.

The survey also revealed some very stark figures about the type of facilities teenagers want. *Over 90%* of respondents want *areas for hanging out and unstructured physical activity* as opposed to only *5% asking for more sports facilities*. This challenges the stereotype of teenagers hanging out only because they are bored. *Hanging out is seen as a desirable activity in itself* and is not a result of having nothing to do. Given the stereotypes of today's teenagers with heads stuck to screens and not interested in fitness it is very positive to see the high demand for unstructured physical activity and play as well as for real life social interaction.

The survey results are clear: that providing more *organised activities for teenagers is not what they want*. Research into provision of existing facilities for teenagers within the county corroborates the findings of the survey. Sports clubs across the county were asked if they had teenage membership and if they would accept new teenage members. It was found that *there are ample opportunities for teenagers to engage in sport* across the county if they wish. The Community Section also report that Community Centres offering services to teenagers- e.g. dance, drama etc. are not over-subscribed.

Based on the results of the survey the following recommendations are made:

1. Create a series of **Outdoor Hangout/Meeting Places** for teenagers. The most popular suggestions from the survey were for places to sit and chat and access to play facilities such as swings, climbing and zip lines. Other requests in these spaces were for free WIFI, shelter, a place to play music, toilets and water fonts.
2. Create areas for **Outdoor Unstructured Physical Activity**- Generally this is self-directed activity rather than organised sport. All-weather pitches, MUGAS and Astro pitches were the most popular followed by skateparks, biking facilities, basketball courts and outdoor fitness areas.
3. Investigate means of providing **Indoor Hangout / Meeting Places**. This is proposed by the investigating the **Unstructured Hangout Areas in Community Centres**-(games room/sport hall/ cafés) or in areas associated with Community Centres. Investigate provision of **Cafés in Parks**. These would provide a service to all park users but would be particularly beneficial to teenagers as a social outlet.
4. **Develop a Specific App** to provide better information on Council facilities and Services to teenagers. Many respondents asked for facilities that currently already exist but that they are not accessing. We have an opportunity to gather information relevant to these facilities in one place for ease of access.

Recommendation 1:

Provide Outdoor Meeting Places/Hangouts for Teenagers:

Location is key to providing meeting places for teenagers. It needs to be a place to be seen and that will bring life and youth culture into the area. A prominent public location should be selected with good passive supervision from roads. Any hidden areas are likely to be subject to antisocial activity and unsafe for most teenagers. The main element of these spaces will be the seating. Seating should be modern and welcoming to young people. It should be suitable for use by one or two people or by larger groups.



Example of stylish seating allowing teens to meet up and hangout in small or large groups. These spaces are not only a destination for passive recreation but can add vibrancy to an area.





Non formal Seating can liven up public space and can make for a fun hangout spot- a place to be seen.



Recommendation 1 continued:

As part of the hangout areas teenagers asked for **Play** facilities such as swings, climbing and zip lines. During the play space consultations teenagers always asked for access to play equipment and not to be excluded from playgrounds. There is no reason in terms of suitability of equipment that they should be excluded. Below are examples of play facilities well suited to use by teenagers.



Basket swings and spinning disks allow groups of teens to use the equipment together. They are a great opportunity for showing off and for mixing of boys and girls.



Teenagers require more vigorous play than younger children so swinging, spinning and anything that thrills is always popular. These areas should be designed to combine socialising, exercise and play.

Other requests in these spaces were for free WIFI, shelter, a place to play music, toilets and drinking water fountains.

Music plays a central part in modern youth culture and a facility where teens could play music would be very popular. This can be achieved using Amplifying Smart Phone Speakers.



Volumes can be controlled and the units set to operate at agreed times and to agreed noise levels. No external electricity is needed for some models.

Free Wi-Fi point:



This is an increasingly prevalent part of young people's lives and features high in terms of what they want in their social spaces.

Drinking water fountains- where teenagers are hanging out and playing/exercising they need access to drinking water and toilets



Recommendation 2:

Provide Outdoor Areas for Unstructured Physical Activity.

These areas allow for self-directed activity rather than organised sport but require some sports infrastructure. All-weather pitches, MUGAS and Astro pitches were the most popular followed by skate-parks, biking facilities, basketball courts and outdoor fitness areas. These areas should have associated seating allowing teenagers to drop in and out of the activity or just observe.



Basketball courts with seating above. Exercise Park below



Exercise Stations, Multi Use Games Areas, basketball courts, skateboarding areas and parkour areas allow teenagers to take ownership of areas as well as getting physical activity and a place to hang out with friends



Tumble bars provide an opportunity for fun and exercise



Table Tennis tables



Parkour



Skateboarding area & hangout combined



MUGA



Informal kickabout area



Bike trail



Informal games wall



Sheltered exercise area/seating point



Area with a combination of ball court, shelter and seating in a park setting



Combination of seating/climbing and exercise/gym equipment

Recommendation 3.

Provide Indoor Meeting Places/Hangouts for Teenagers:

Create teenager's hangout areas in **Community Centres** or in areas associated with Community Centres. This may not be possible in every site so we should also investigate providing Cafes in Parks.



Teenagers would like areas to hangout, get a coffee, watch movies, play pool, have free WIFI, meet friends, enjoy gaming or engage in informal sporting or fitness activity. Developing teen areas close to Community Centres would also give some security to them and provide access to toilets.

Recommendation 3 continued: Cafés in parks would provide a service to all park users but would be particularly beneficial to teenagers as a social outlet. Cafes could be provided in an existing park buildings or Community Centres or portable buildings could be used.

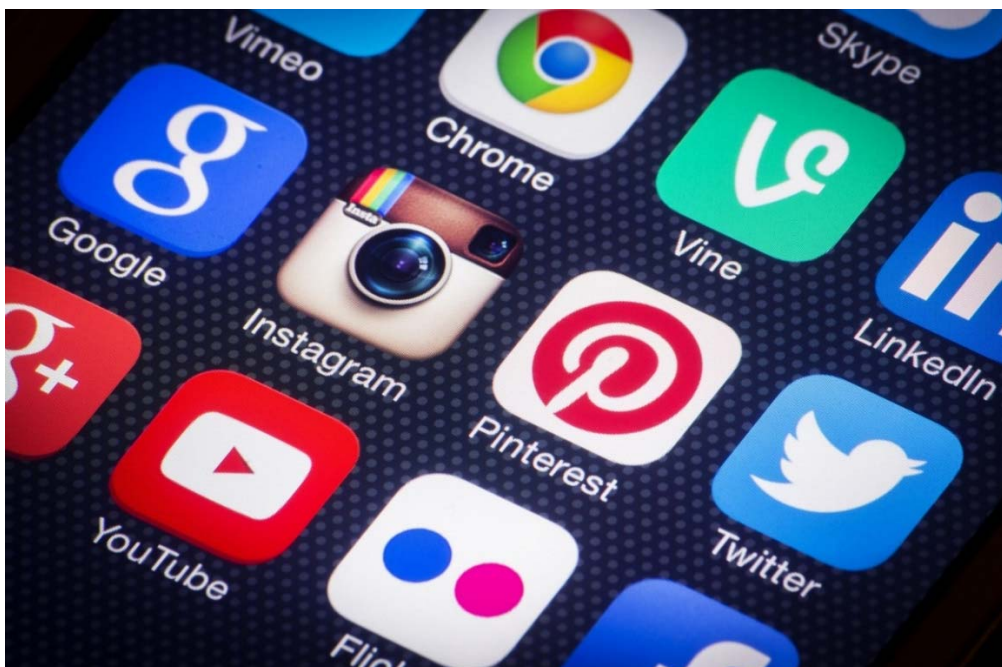


The Youth Services-organised youth cafés facilitate 10 youths to every 1 adult, which causes difficulties if more teenagers casually turn up and have to be turned away. With a park café open to all park users there is no expectation that the teenagers will be supervised so the issue of staff ratios is not an issue. The café would benefit all park users and could be located to give passive supervision to play areas or teenager hangout areas. Having a café in the park is also a useful way to provide toilet facilities to park users.

Recommendation 4:

Collate and Provide Information on Teenage Facilities / Services

Investigate the **development of an app or other methods** to provide better information on Council facilities and services to teenagers. Many respondents asked for facilities that currently already exist but that they are obviously unaware of / currently not accessing. How teenagers communicate and get information has changed. They expect all information to be readily accessible online and may be unaware of information posted elsewhere.



SDCC have an opportunity to gather information relevant to these facilities in one place in a way that is readily accessible to teenagers. The Communications Unit will investigate this.

The information on existing facilities is available but requires collating and presenting in a coherent fashion.

Next Steps:

Further Consultation

At the time of the report the Councils' Public Realm and Community Services are consulting further with senior managers in the three primary service providers, DDLETB, Foróige and Crosscare.

These service providers have been invited to a briefing on the findings of this report and it is intended to discuss the recommendations and explore other options that may be available. There have been a number of questions raised by the report and the preliminary findings and draft recommendations can be interrogated at this stage before further progress.

It is intended to consult further with teenagers by assembling focus groups to:

- Explore and expand on comments and detail gathered during the survey stage.
- Discuss the preliminary report and draft recommendations.
- Interrogate and verify the interpretation of the survey results.
- Gain further information with regard to possible projects, potential locations etc.

Pilot Projects 2018

It is intended to progress the current preliminary recommendations via a number of Pilot Projects where various types of teenage facilities can be tested:

- **Recommendation 1 (Outdoor Meeting Places / Hangout Areas):**
 - Install a Giant Bench, location to be confirmed. Funded from playspace budget.
- **Recommendation 2 (Unstructured Outdoor Physical Activity):**
 - Ball Wall, Lucan. Funding committed in 2018 as part of 2017 Participatory Budget Outcome.
- **Recommendations 1 & 2 (Outdoor Meeting Places / Hangout Areas and Unstructured Outdoor Physical Activity):**
 - Provide a teen space with seating and some play equipment adjacent to a play area where teenage facilities are lacking. Location to be confirmed. Funded from playspace budget.
- **Recommendation 3 (Unstructured Indoor Meeting Areas/Hangout Areas-Cafés in Parks):**
 - A kiosk-style café, location to be confirmed

Teenage Facility Programme 2019 onwards:

The capital budget 2018-2020 has included an allocation for teenage facilities to commence in 2019. The Final Report on the Teenage Study and Recommendations will provide the results of the further consultation outlined above, report on the progress and preliminary outcomes of the pilot projects and make final recommendations on the facilities that will be provided within the Teenage Facility Programme.