

Making Space for Teenagers in the Public Realm

Final Report
on the
Teenage Facilities Study

December 2018

Introduction

South Dublin County Council commenced a consultation process with teenagers from 2017 into 2018, which examined 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.

A report presented the preliminary findings of the study and the draft recommendations to the Environment Public Realm and Climate Change SPC on the 01 05 2018 and the County Council Meeting on the 14 05 2018.

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 teenagers meet 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 usually just normal social interaction. Parents of younger children often see groups of teenagers using playgrounds in a very negative light.

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 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 sports 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.

The following recommendations were made at the interim report stage following analysis of the survey results:

- Create a series of **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.
- Create areas for **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.
- Investigate means of providing **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.
- 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.

Further Consultation:

A number of particular proposals were proposed in the interim report to respond to the survey results. These preliminary findings and draft recommendations required interrogation in association with a number of stakeholders to ensure robustness before finalising this report and progressing to project delivery. So following the interim report further consultations were held with local teenagers and groups who worked with teenager and youth services.

SDCC Community Services facilitated a meeting with the senior managers in the three primary service providers DDLETB, Foróige and Crosscare. At the meeting a presentation was made on the preliminary teenage facility report and on the above proposals. We received a very positive response and will have their support when carrying out site specific consultations with young people. There is huge willingness to co-operate with SDCC on the programme.

SDCC also consulted with Comhairle Na N'óg and attended a youth festival with Foroige which again gave us further insights into the needs of teenagers.

In addition the Council contacted SpunOut.ie to discuss the teenage facilities programme. Spunout.ie is a youth information service for people aged between 16 and 25. They provide advice on physical and mental health and well-being and are a well-known provider of information to young people. They were particularly useful in advising on how to make contact with and engage teenagers.

In all of our consultations throughout this stage we were focused on presenting the results of the survey and the draft recommendations with a view to discussing and verifying the above results; gaining feedback with regard to the recommendations and robustly querying the conclusions.

Following this stage it was decided not to proceed with the fourth item listed (the app development) as it is felt that this item is already well served by other apps and a council specific app would not be useful. The advice was to use existing platforms such as twitter, facebook and Instagram to provide information to young people and to engage with the youth service providers locally.

We also had an opportunity to discuss our proposals with Sport Ireland and participate in a recent stakeholder forum on health and the built environment. It became obvious from our discussion and from the conference that our proposals are very much in line with the National Physical Activity Plan. Minister Simon Harris opened the conference and spoke about how the wider environment participates in making a healthier country. He said the National Physical Activity Plan involved the use of physical infrastructure to transform our health and behaviour. He pointed to opportunities to be healthier that have come out of the development of greenways around the country. Minister Catherine Byrne pointed to the links between our physical environment and our behaviour and how we should be aiming to create healthy environment

All of these points about promoting health apply to this teenage facilities plan. Health is defined by the World Health Organisation as physical, mental and social wellbeing. It is our belief that the teenage facilities directly addresses these issues and will contribute to a healthier county.

Recommendation 1:

Provide 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.

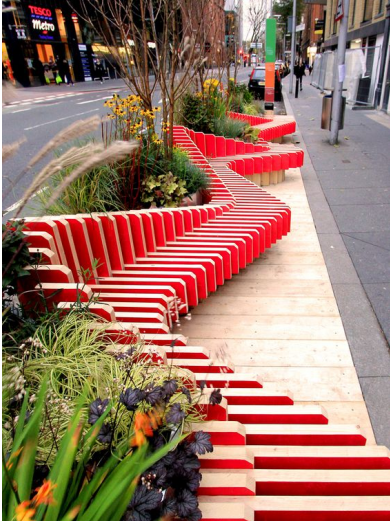


Example of stylish seating allowing teens to meet up and hangout in small or large groups. These spaces are not only a destination for passive recreation but can add vibrancy to an area.





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 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



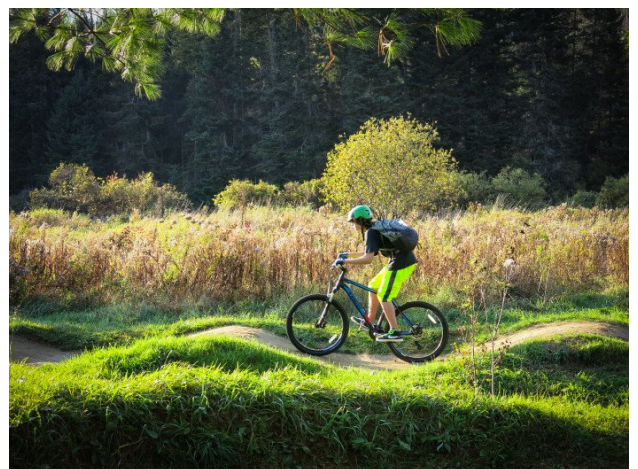
Skateboarding area & hangout combined



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.

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.

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 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.

DELIVERING TEENAGE FACILITIES:

Based on the work carried out above there is a pressing need for facilities for teenagers in South Dublin County. The Council are proposing a provision of €500,000 in 2019 and a similar provision over the following 2 years in the capital budget 2019-2021; to allow the roll out of a programme for the delivery of these facilities. Based on this programme

it is intended that similar facilities can be incorporated into developments and other projects going forward; similar to the roll out of play spaces across the county.