

Limerick County Council

Local Play Policy



As adopted by Limerick County Council,
28th February 2005

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INTRODUCTION

Limerick County Council's mission statement is *"To enhance the lives of the people of County Limerick through the efficient delivery of accessible quality services and the promotion of sustainable balanced development"*. To this end, Limerick County Council values children as an integral part of the community and recognises the importance of play and its role in promoting children's development, learning, creativity and independence.

In accordance with the existing County Development Plan 1999 – 2004, Limerick County Council aims to:

"Ensure the provision of an attractive living environment in each residential area through ensuring the provision of usable open public space, a mix of housing densities, various designs and appropriate landscaping" (1999:15)

and also

"Adopt a positive approach to recreational developments in towns and villages throughout the County" (1999:87).

Under the current Draft County Development Plan 2005 - 2011, and in particular Policy statements CR21 and CR17, Limerick County Council seeks to address the provision of public playgrounds within the County, as follows:

CR21 *"It is the policy of the Council to seek the provision and suitable management of hard surfaced children's play areas in new housing developments and to implement measures to find suitable sites for their provision in existing residential areas."*

CR17 *"It is the policy of the Council to facilitate the provision of adequate recreational open space and facilities for all groups of the population at a convenient distance from their homes and places of work."*

The Council is also committed to working towards the goals of Limerick County Development Board's ten year Strategy for the Social, Economic and Cultural Development of County Limerick entitled "*Working together for a better future*". The strategy is comprised of a number of themes one of which is "*Quality of Life*" within which the "*Family Support*" sub-theme aims to provide support to families to enable their full participation in the economic, social and cultural life of the County. It is under this aim, and in conjunction with the guidelines outlined in the National Play Policy "*Ready, Steady, Play*" (2004), that the local play policy for County Limerick is being developed. This Policy is aimed principally at children up to and including primary school age i.e. 0-12 year olds, however, the general principles relating to play are relevant to all children up to 18 years of age. A national recreation policy aimed at older children/teenagers is to be published in 2005 and Limerick County Council looks forward to implementing its guidelines.

VISION STATEMENT

All children have a right to Play and Limerick County Council recognises the rights of the child as stated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) whereby:

"The child shall have full opportunity to play and recreation, which should be directed to the same purposes as education: society and the public authorities shall endeavour to promote the enjoyment of this right." (Article 7).

In addition Limerick County Council further recognises:

"The right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts" (Article 31).

The vision statement for the Local Play Policy is as follows:

“Limerick County Council will provide an appropriate framework, within which, the provision of public play opportunities for all children (0-12 year olds) in County Limerick will be addressed through the work of Council departments and in partnership with the community and other agencies”.

Furthermore, in accordance with the principles underpinning the National Play Policy: *“Ready, Steady, Play”* (2004) Limerick County Council proposes a Local Play Policy which is child centred, family oriented, equitable, inclusive, action oriented and integrated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Why a Local Play Policy?

The National Children’s Strategy was launched by the Government in November 2000. It is a 10-year plan that aims to improve the quality of all children’s lives. It includes a range of proposed actions one of which is to ensure that every child has access to play opportunities. A commitment was made under this Strategy to develop National Play and Recreation Policies for Ireland. This commitment was further developed under the agreed programme for Government with the publication of the National Play Policy in March 2004, which provides the contextual environment for the provision of a local play policy for County Limerick.

In recognition of the importance of play, Limerick County Council is producing a local play policy, to provide a framework within which the work of Council departments in partnership with the community and other agencies can be supported and progressed.

The Local Play Policy is guided by the objectives of the National Play Policy (2004) which are as follows:

- To give children a voice in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities,
- To raise awareness of the importance of play,
- To ensure that children's play needs are met through the development of a child friendly environment,
- To maximise the range of public play opportunities available to all children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability,
- To improve the quality and safety of playgrounds and play areas,
- To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children,
- To develop a partnership approach in funding and developing play opportunities, and
- To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in Ireland.

The Local Play Policy will provide a format within which the aims, objectives and guidelines for the provision of public play opportunities in the County will be addressed.

DEFINITION OF PLAY

In line with the National Play Policy the following definition of play by Garvey (1977:10) will be used to guide the work of Limerick County Council:

“Play is pleasurable, enjoyable. Even when not actually accompanied by signs of mirth, it is still positively valued by the player.....Play has no extrinsic goals. Its motivations are intrinsic and serve no other objectives. In fact, it is more an enjoyment of means than an effort devoted to some particular end. In utilitarian terms it is inherently unproductive.....Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is not obligatory but is freely chosen by the player.....Play involves some active engagement on the part of the player.”

BENEFITS OF PLAY

In looking to the benefits of play, Cole-Hamilton and Gill (2002) discuss the importance of promoting children’s development, learning, creativity and independence in conjunction with keeping children healthy and active. Furthermore they note the importance of allowing children to find out about themselves, their abilities and their interests, while giving them a chance to let off steam and have fun which will in turn have a therapeutic effect. In addition the Children’s Play Council (CPC: 2002) have determined that play can be advantageous both immediately and in the long term:

TABLE 1: IMMEDIATE BENEFITS OF PLAY

- ★ Provides children with opportunities to enjoy freedom and exercise choice and control over their actions
- ★ Offers children opportunities for testing boundaries and exploring risk
- ★ Offers a very wide range of physical, social and intellectual experiences for children (CPC, 2002).

TABLE 2: LONG TERM BENEFITS OF PLAY

- ★ Fosters children’s independence and self-esteem
- ★ Develops children’s respect for others and offers opportunities for social interaction
- ★ Supports the child’s well being, healthy growth and development
- ★ Increases children’s knowledge and understanding
- ★ Promotes children’s creativity and capacity to learn (CPC, 2002).

TYPES OF PLAY FACILITY

Different aspects of play will require different types of provision to challenge children. A wide range of play opportunities should be considered. The term playground area refers to all the options outlined below:

Local Parks

Large open public spaces managed by the local authority. They may include environmental features such as ponds, willow domes, maze structures and / or fixed equipment.

Community Play Areas in Residential Areas

These are designated areas within areas of housing. They may simply be green areas incorporating aspects of environmental play or could also incorporate a few pieces of fixed equipment, seating areas etc.

Community Play Areas in Rural Areas

These are designated areas within rural areas, which are adequately overlooked. These may simply be green areas and/or could incorporate fixed equipment, seating areas etc.

Fixed Equipment Playgrounds

These are permanent, non-commercial outdoor facilities providing age appropriate equipment and spaces for play, in areas that are safe and enclosed.

Play Areas

Open space zoned for recreation or free play purposes. This area will not have fixed equipment.

RESEARCHING PLAY NEEDS WITH CHILDREN IN COUNTY LIMERICK

In addressing one of the objectives of the Local Play Policy and also Objective One of the National Play Policy (2004) Limerick County Council consulted with children in County Limerick in order “*To give [them] a voice in the design and implementation of [local] play policies and facilities*”. Limerick County Council held a dedicated facilitated session in June 2004 and also facilitated workshops at the 2002 and 2003 Comhairlí na n-Óg which addressed play and recreation for children and young people in County Limerick. A representative sample of children and young people from around the county aged between 6 and 17 years attended.

In order to ensure that the group was broadly representative of young people’s views, invitations were issued by Limerick County Development Board to children and young people through primary and secondary schools, youth clubs and associations such as Limerick Youth Services, Foroige and Tipperary Youth Services.

Considering the wide range of ages and abilities of the children, it was decided from a developmental perspective that the use of age-specific workshops should be employed. The workshops were structured to empower the children and young people to voice their opinions and formulate their ideas as constructively and succinctly as possible.



A summary of the research findings is outlined in Table 3 below and more detailed results can be found in Appendix 1.

TABLE 3: RESULTS OF CONSULTATION PROCESS WITH CHILDREN IN COUNTY LIMERICK

- Ⓢ To the children of County Limerick play is physical

- Ⓢ Playgrounds should be:
 - Ⓢ Age specific
 - Ⓢ Supervised (by guardians)
 - Ⓢ Access – before and after school, all day at weekends and school holidays
 - Ⓢ Accessible to all
 - Ⓢ Free
 - Ⓢ Near to where they live
 - Ⓢ Contain a variety of activities
 - Ⓢ There should be more facilities next to playgrounds
 - Ⓢ There should be activities and facilities for adults

Furthermore, in their discussion of playgrounds the children and young people consulted stressed the importance of access to fun and safe activities, which would help them to exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In particular they noted that this would give them somewhere to go and be with friends instead of finding themselves in trouble, or turning to drink or drugs. This information, gleaned through the consultation process, has been utilised to inform County Limerick's Local Play Policy.

CONSULTATION SCHEDULE FOR THE DRAFT LIMERICK COUNTY COUNCIL LOCAL PLAY POLICY

Limerick County Council consulted widely with community and voluntary groups and relevant statutory agencies in the preparation and development of the Draft Local Play Policy for Co. Limerick.

Following an initial consultation with a sample of school-children from the five electoral areas in the County, a draft Policy was prepared by the staff of the County Council over the summer months.

The following Schools were involved in the initial Consultation with children from County Limerick. Thirty-two children attended aged between 6-12 years old.

TABLE 4: SCHOOLS INVOLVED IN THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

Electoral Area	Area	School
Bruff	Bruff	Bruff Convent
	Adare	Scoil Naomh Iosaf
Castleconnell	Cappamore	Cappamore Convent
	Lisnagry	Lisnagry N.S.
Kilmallock	Kilfinane	Kilfinane Convent
	Kilmallock	Martinstown N.S.
Newcastle West	Abbeyfeale	Abbeyfeale Boys N.S.
	Newcastle West	St. Joseph's NS
Rathkeale	Foynes	S.N. Sheanain
	Askeaton	Ballysteen N.S.
	Kildimo	Kildimo N.S.

During the months of October to January, public consultation on the draft Policy took place. A copy of the draft Policy was circulated to the members of the following groups in advance of a consultation meeting, at which a presentation was made followed by discussion.

- Area Meetings of Limerick County Council
 - Castleconnell
 - Newcastle West
 - Bruff
 - Kilmallock
 - Rathkeale

- The Social Inclusion Measures Sub-Committee of Limerick County Development Board
- Limerick County Development Board
- Limerick County Community & Voluntary Forum
- Mid-Western Health Board Pre-School Advisory Committee
- Co. Limerick Childcare Committee
- Co. Limerick Local Sports Partnership
- The Local Education Committee, Rathkeale
- Two public meetings were also held in Raheen and Newcastle West

In the case of consultation with the general public, advertisements were placed in the local papers highlighting the fact that the draft Policy was available on the Limerick County Council web-site, or by contacting the Office of Community and Enterprise and also highlighting the two nights of public consultation. On the nights of the public consultation, copies of the draft Policy were made available with a presentation and discussion taking place. Copies of the Policy were also circulated to the Youth Affairs Sub-Committee of the Co. Limerick VEC.

Submissions and comments were received through the meetings and also from individuals throughout the County who contacted the County Council.

The final draft, with amendments from the consultation was then brought to the Corporate Policy Group who recommended adoption of the Policy to the full Council.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In light of Limerick County Council's commitment to working towards the goals of Limerick County Development Board's "*Working together for a better future*" Strategy document, the following guiding principles as outlined in the National Play Policy (2004) will underpin the objectives of County Limerick's Local Play Policy:

- Child centred: in planning a child-friendly environment and public play facilities, the best interests of the child will be a primary consideration and children's wishes and feelings will be given due regard;
- Family oriented: publicly-funded play policies and facilities will be established in a manner which supports and empowers families within the community;
- Equitable: all children should have equality of opportunity, access, and participation in publicly-funded play. A key priority in promoting a more equitable society for children is to target investment in public play at those most in need;
- Inclusive: the diversity of children's experiences, cultures, lifestyles and levels of ability must be recognised in the design and implementation of play policies and facilities;
- Action oriented: the planning and construction of public play policies and facilities must be clearly focused on achieving specified results to agreed standards in a targeted and cost-effective manner;
- Integrated: play policies and play facilities should be delivered in a co-ordinated manner through integrated needs-analysis and policy planning (National Play Policy, 2004: 13)

- Quality Standards: we are committed to providing high quality play opportunities in compliance with recommended National and European standards and relevant legislation; and
- Age Appropriate: our play policy must reflect both the age and stage of development of the child.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

As stated in the vision statement, the Aim of the Local Play Policy is *“To provide an appropriate framework, within which, the provision of public play opportunities for all children (0-12 year olds) in County Limerick will be addressed, through the work of Council departments and in partnership with the community and other agencies”*.

Limerick County Council’s Local Play Policy objectives are a fusion of national objectives as stated in the National Play Policy, and local objectives as gleaned from the initial consultation with the children of County Limerick. The objectives are as follows:

- Consultation - To enable children, parents, communities and other interested parties to have a voice in the planning, design and implementation of play policies and facilities;
- Awareness – To raise awareness of the importance of play;
- Child-friendly environment - To ensure that children’s play needs are met through the development of a child friendly environment;
- Location and Access - To endeavour to make age appropriate public play opportunities available and free to all children, particularly children who are marginalised, disadvantaged or who have a disability;

- Equipment, Amenities, Safety and Quality - To facilitate and support the increased provision of safe, high quality public playgrounds and play areas with appropriate amenities for both children and adults;
- Training - To ensure that the relevant training and qualifications are available to persons offering play and related services to children;
- Information - To improve information on, and evaluation and monitoring of, play provision for children in County Limerick;
- Insurance and Maintenance – To consider, resources permitting, taking on the insurance and maintenance of community play facilities, subject to being satisfied that appropriate standards and guidelines have been adhered to (currently I.S. EN 1176, 1177 details of which are contained in Appendix II);
- Sources of funding - To develop a partnership approach (with the community and other agencies) to funding and developing play opportunities - the Council’s contribution in the development of play provision will be subject to available financial and staff resources;
- Role of the Community – To support and enable local communities in the provision of play facilities by engaging and working together in the development and ongoing operation of local playground facilities and play areas. A local community contribution will also be necessary to highlight the commitment of the community to the facility.

The continued provision of play facilities will be subject to maintenance costs (including any litigation costs) and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis by Limerick County Council.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

Under the National Play Policy, “*Ready, Steady, Play*” Action No. 18 requires that Local Authorities prepare a local play policy in consultation with children and other stakeholders. Action No. 11 requires that each City/County Development Board will prepare a co-ordinated multi-agency County Play Plan, in consultation with children and communities, for improved play facilities. This plan will take account of the changing play needs of children as they age.

The County Play Plan will be the mechanism by which this Policy is implemented. With a co-ordinated multi-agency approach, the County Play Plan will detail the actions and roles of all the relevant agencies involved in the provision of play opportunities in County Limerick, including Limerick County Council and local communities. Limerick County Development Board has delegated the responsibility for drafting this Plan to one of its sub-committees, the County Limerick Local Sports Partnership (CLLSP).

The County Play Plan will be brought to Limerick County Council through the Strategic Policy Committee system for consultation, monitoring and review and also to the full Council as appropriate.

Limerick County Council is committed to:

- Engaging in an inclusive and co-ordinated multi-agency approach in the development and implementation of a plan for the provision of improved play facilities.

- Delivering the objectives of the Local Play Policy within available resources and to the highest possible standards. This includes committing funding from the Development Contribution Scheme towards playground provision/enhancement; training of staff in the maintenance and inspection of playgrounds and extending insurance cover to include outdoor community playgrounds provided that the appropriate standards and guidelines have been adhered to.

- Assigning an Officer whose responsibilities will include co-ordinating and overseeing the implementation of the plan.
- Prioritising areas of greatest need in the provision of play facilities.
- Taking into account the needs of each of the five electoral areas of the County in the provision of play facilities.

REFERENCES:

- Children's Play Council (2002) *More than Swings and Roundabouts: Planning or Outdoor Play*, London, National Children's Bureau Enterprises.
- Cole-Hamilton, I and Gill, T (2002) *Making the Case for Play: Building Policies and Strategies for School-Aged Children*, London, National Children's Bureau Enterprises.
- Garvey, C. (1977), *Play: The Developing Child*, Glasgow, A. William Collins Sons and Co.
- National Children's Office (2004) *Ready, Steady, Play*, Dublin, Ireland, National Children's Office.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1989) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Appendix I – Consultation with Children in County Limerick

In addressing the objectives of a Play Policy as outlined in the National Play Policy (2004) Limerick County Council held a dedicated facilitated session in June 2004 and facilitated workshops at the 2002 and 2003 Comhairlí na n-Óg which addressed play and recreation for children and young people in County Limerick. A representative sample of children and young people from around the County aged between 6 and 17 years of age attended. The results of the workshops are summarised in the following section under the following questions:

- *What is play?*
- *Access to facilities?*
- *Benefits of Play?*
- *What makes a good playground?*
- *Are playgrounds accessible?*

What is play?

The majority of children and young people who participated in the research discussed play as both a pastime and a fun way of fulfilling an interest. Play was discussed in terms of physical activities and sports such as: Football, Swimming, Hurling, Soccer, Tennis, Rugby, Walking, Basketball, Horse riding, Skipping, Skating, Cycling, Running, Martial Arts, Badminton, Squash, Rounders, Community Games, Fishing and Golf to name a few. However a considerable proportion of their free time is spent doing nothing, hanging around at either their own or friends houses.

Access to facilities?

However their access to such facilities was severely limited and most of the participants spoke of playing sports in school grounds and car parks.

Children and young people stated that access and the facilities available for physical play varies from area to area but that in most instances respondents had access to

some of the following; Parks, Youth clubs, GAA, Leisure centre, Rugby, Football, Soccer, Basketball court and Camogie. They also stated that they would also like more playgrounds, youth clubs and fun parks. However, one of the issues noted is that the current facilities provided in playgrounds are suitable for children (Ages 2 - 12) and not young people (Age 12+), they are caught in a position in some areas where they are too old for the existing facilities and yet not old enough to join the leisure centre.

Benefits of Play?

When asked about the importance of playgrounds and recreation areas children and young people stressed the importance of access to fun, safe and supervised activities in order that they would have somewhere to go and be with friends instead of getting in trouble, turning to drink/drugs and to help them exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

What makes a good playground?

The 6-9 age group were impressed by playgrounds, which had lots of variety and colour, but stressed that they needed a place to meet friends and feed ducks. In addition they listed the following as elements of a good playground; swings, slides, see-saw, round about (rubber plate to stand on which moves around), crazy golf, swing ball, tennis court, basket ball, spring rocking horse, mirror maze, sports field, soccer pitch, mini golf, water slide and roller coaster, barbeque, a stage, pitch and putt, climbing bars, tip rugby, massive garden for adults, picnic area, boxing ring, punch bags and water balloons. They also suggested an all weather pitch, a wall where younger children are allowed to paint/draw/write, a trampoline, moving space ship, dance mat, hopscotch, American football, bouncing castle, magician, jungle gym, a lake or water (with ducks), toy shop, sweet shop, clean toilets, waterfall, indoor hurling, bar, ice cream stall, ice skating, hockey, shelter for rain, food stand, swimming pool, cycling path, place for makeovers, skate board ramps, disco outside/music, bench, volleyball, draughts, running track, indoor soccer, boxing ring/wrestling, trampoline, tip the can, racing car, marbles, bike racing, slope to go down on bike/scooter, pool, a big mat with snakes and ladders on it, bowling alley, mini golf wings, outside jungle jims, a marble zone, steam train.

The 10+ age group identified that the good playgrounds they've been in have had good slides, climbing frame, swings, bumper cars, mountain climbing frames, monkey bars, roundabout, sand pit, and a separate area for smaller children. The supervision of playgrounds was also found to be essential as was wheelchair access. In addition they identified the following elements as part of a good playground; swings (big and small), pitch and putt, tunnels, tennis, football, soccer, a lot of slides big and small, climbing frame, bumper cars, fun houses, climbing wall, a roundabout, monkey bars, climbing rope or bridge with mats underneath, trampoline and a sandpit and seesaw for small kids.

They suggested that a good playground should have separate areas for different age groups and suggested breaking up the age groups into the following categories, 1-5, 6-9, 10+, with opening hours which would allow them to access the playground before and after school and all day during school holidays. Both age groups expressed concern about vandalism and suggested that the playgrounds should be supervised.

Are playgrounds accessible?

In general they agreed that play and recreation facilities were accessible to most people in their area except for those with disabilities and the elderly but agreed that everybody should have access to playgrounds. In addition both age groups are limited by their dependence on others for transport in order to access to play facilities and playgrounds.

Although both age groups expressed a strong interest in going to playgrounds both groups initially thought that they would be more appropriate for younger age groups, even though both age groups had been to playgrounds in other parts of Limerick, Ireland (Listowel, Tralee, Doneraile, Limerick City, Ballybunion, Dublin) and the UK and had enjoyed the experience. None of the participants had paid to access the playgrounds and expressed strong opinions that access to playgrounds should be free due to their restricted access to funds. However it was noted that access to one playground in Abbeyfeale is covered by an annual subscription.

In the main they went to playgrounds with their family, parents, uncles, aunts, cousins or friends in general and with children their own age or older. Notably the 6-9 age

group expressed frustration with their parent's non-participation in activities in playgrounds.

Appendix II – I.S. EN 1176 & 1177

The CEN (European Committee for Standardisation) has introduced European Standards in relation to playgrounds. These standards have been published under the authority of the National Standards Authority of Ireland and have now become Irish Standards as and from the dates below.

They are not Regulations and therefore not legal documents.

I.S. EN 1177:1998 – Impact Absorbing Playground Surfacing – Safety Requirements and Test Methods

I.S. EN 1176-1:1998 - Playground Equipment – Part 1: General Safety Requirements and Test Methods

I.S. EN 1176-2:1999 - Playground Equipment – Part 2: Additional Specific Safety Requirements and Test Methods for Swings

I.S. EN 1176-3:1999 - Playground Equipment – Part 3: Additional Specific Safety Requirements and Test Methods for Slides

I.S. EN 1176-4:1999 - Playground Equipment – Part 4: Additional Specific Safety Requirements and Test Methods for Runways

I.S. EN 1176-5:1999 - Playground Equipment – Part 5: Additional Specific Safety Requirements and Test Methods for Carousels

I.S. EN 1176-6:1999 – Playground Equipment – Part 6: Additional Specific Safety Requirements and Test Methods for Rocking Equipment

I.S. EN 1176-7:1998 – Playground Equipment-Part 7: Guidance on Installation, Inspection, Maintenance and Operation