



# DRAFT GUIDE TO OPEN SPACE

Laois County Council

Planning & Transportation  
Strategic Policy Committee



Forward Planning Section  
January 2019

## PLANNING DEPARTMENT

For further information in relation to applying for Pre-Planning or Planning Permission please visit [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie) or contact the Planning Department on:

 (057) 8664039

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*Public open space can have a positive impact on both the quality of the environment and physical and mental well being. Open space provides spaces to meet, interact, exercise and relax. Through the provision of advice and guidelines for the design of open space, the Planning Authority aims to create an environment that can be used by all people, regardless of their age, size, disability or ability. In this regard, the Planning Authority will ensure that a full range of facilities for recreation and amenity are provided in new residential developments which are commensurate with the scale of new development.*

### LAOIS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN REQUIREMENTS

The Development Management Standards of the Laois County Development Plan require that public space:

- Be clearly defined and of high quality design and finish
- Contribute to the overall attractiveness of the development
- Be easily maintained
- Be easy to access from all areas of the development
- Be easy to use by all people
- Has good lighting and natural surveillance
- Is enjoyable to use, walk and cycle around all year
- Include informal play spaces, safe well lit pathways which facilitate learning to cycle, walking safely and encourage social interaction
- Include planting in public and private areas
- Should be provided at a minimum rate of 10% of the total site area in large infill or brown field sites

A detailed plan for hard and soft landscaping, prepared by a suitably qualified landscape architect, should be submitted for each proposed development.



### PLANNING FOR BIODIVERSITY

In planning new developments the Planning Authority will require the enhancement of biodiversity through plans incorporating features or measures to foster biodiversity and enrich ecological networks including:

- Habitat restoration, recreation and expansion
- Preservation of habitat features, ecological linkages and stepping stones including woodlands, hedgerows, trees, eskers, railway embankments, verges, ditches, riverside vegetation and wetlands
- Improved links between existing sites
- Buffering of existing important sites
- Provision of new biodiversity features within developments
- Ensure the planting of only native plants, trees and shrubbery
- Consider installation of bird or bat boxes
- Protect water quality through best practice construction methods
- Consideration for the timing of works to avoid disturbance to species during breeding, feeding, roosting or hibernation
- Avoidance of unnecessary or excessive outdoor lighting
- Securing management for long term enhancement.



## BIODIVERSITY AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017—2021 sets out Ireland’s key strategies and actions to meet and act on our obligations to protect our biodiversity for the benefit of future generations. A number of Local Biodiversity Action Plans for settlements in County Laois have been prepared and are available to view on [www.laois.ie/biodiversity](http://www.laois.ie/biodiversity)



Biodiversity is the variety of living things around us, from mammals and birds to plants and microbes and the habitats they live in. The biodiversity of a site refers to the range of species and habitats found there.

The Planning Authority aims to facilitate the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity through green infrastructure. Green infrastructure can be defined as a network of green spaces and features such as street trees and green roofs that is planned, designed and managed to provide a range of benefits. Increasing green infrastructure within developments could link existing habitats, as well as create new ones, allowing biodiversity to thrive. The design of green infrastructure should have cognisance to the likely changes to biodiversity resulting from climate change.

## DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS ON BIODIVERSITY

Proposed developments have the potential to impact negatively, positively or cumulatively on biodiversity if not properly planned. However sensitive development can enhance biodiversity and can avoid or mitigate negative impacts such as:

- Direct loss of habitats or ecological value
- Habitat fragmentation
- Loss of ecological connectivity
- Disturbance to species
- Poor quality of water and air
- Spread of alien invasive plant and animal species.



## AMENITIES

The Planning Authority will require the provision of the following amenities commensurate with the scale of residential development:

No. of Dwellings	Amenity Required
<b>&lt;25</b>	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out ) Active amenity open space (Ball Games)
<b>26-99</b>	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out) Active amenity open space (Ball Games) Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min.100m2), <b>or</b> Multi Use Games Area (tennis/ basketball)
<b>100+</b>	Landscaped passive recreational area (sitting out) Active amenity open space (Ball Games) Areas for younger children (Play area/ground) (min. 200m2) Multi Use Games Area (tennis/ basketball) Grass sports pitch/ playing fields <b>or</b> Multi Use Games Area (tennis/ Basketball)



## UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal Design refers to *“the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people, regardless of their age, size ability or disability”*.

Universal design places human diversity at the heart of the design process so that open space can be designed to meet the needs of all persons, regardless of their age, size, physical, sensory, mental health, intellectual ability or disability. Universal design aims to ensure that people can access, use and understand the environment in the most independent and natural manner possible without future adaptations or specialised solutions.

**“Building for Everyone”** provides further guidance regarding the design of the public realm including open space and play spaces. The Building for Everyone series is available online at [www.nda.ie](http://www.nda.ie) and [www.universaldesign.ie](http://www.universaldesign.ie)



Having cognizance to the principles of Universal Design, open space should be designed so as to:

- Be designed in accordance with a Design Appraisal (Access Audit)
- Provide for play, rest and relaxation
- Provide connectivity and permeability throughout the development
- Provide a range of access options
- Provide features and landscaping designed to maximize sensory stimulation and interest
- Ensure play areas are accessible to all
- Ensure play equipment facilitates universal access
- Ensure playgrounds are fenced to prevent access by dogs and include self closing gates to a minimum width of 800mm
- Ensure the surface of play areas is able to cushion falls and meet relevant safety standards
- Provide adequate protection to water features to prevent safety hazards
- Ensure furniture is of a solid, robust low maintenance design
- Ensure landscaping is adequately maintained so that plants do not obstruct access routes and fallen leaves do not create a slip hazard
- Ensure vehicle speeds are kept low to provide a safer place
- Ensure crossing points are clearly identifiable, appropriately located and follow pedestrian desire lines.

