



13.0 AMENITY AND PLAY

13.1 Existing play

Generally existing play facilities in Ballymun are in a poor state with few opportunities for safe play. There are limited day-care nurseries especially for under 5's of working parents. The only play areas in Ballymun that have been successful are those located within the refurbished blocks (seven toddler lots for younger children and one play area for older children) They owe their success largely to limiting access to residents of the blocks and being supervised.

The re-development programme can be seen as an opportunity to provide a rich and varied outdoor environment for the whole age range of children and young people in Ballymun.

13.2 Proposed play

In order to assess how best to improve play facilities it was decided to ask the children of Ballymun their opinion. Using a simple questionnaire, 300 primary school children (150 boys and 150 girls) from 3rd to 6th classes across every primary school in Ballymun were consulted. In addition a number of playground workshops were held at schools to consult with parents as to how and where they would like to see play facilities developed for their children.

In general the children wanted to have safe playgrounds near the areas where they lived that were supervised, clean and free from 'Junkies'. Many children in the older age groups expressed a need for special tracks for rollerblades and BMX's where they could play safe from traffic, and boys especially looked for improved sports facilities. Where younger children played near their homes, they looked for safer roads, their own gardens and a generally cleaner and safer environment around their immediate localities.

13.3 Where will play areas be located

As a result of the consultation with parents and children it is hoped to provide some kind of formal open space or play facility within a five minute walk of most children, reached by only crossing minor streets i.e. child safe routes. A number of play grounds are proposed in the different neighbourhoods, to cater for different age groups. A key to successful play areas is that they are visually linked to an area where supervising adults will predictably spend time.

13.4 What type of play facilities?

As well as providing formal play areas it is also hoped, through the development of housing areas, to provide stimulation in the design of the external environment to encourage games and imaginative play.

This can be achieved by the changes in pattern or texture of paving, design of low walls as sitting areas, and tactile elements such as railings and street furniture. 'Art' in the environment could also be considered to allow for children participating in designs for paving, mosaics, sculptures, street furniture and features.

In addition many residents will have gardens or courtyards for the first time which will allow 'doorstep' play where children, especially 4-6 year olds, can play with a degree of independence but still be in calling distance from home. This type of play also allows a degree of informal and unobtrusive supervision from surrounding homes. Traffic danger can threaten and reduce children's play areas so traffic calming measures will need to be incorporated in residential areas. Designers should aim for a low design speed of <20mph on roads in residential areas.

13.5 What age groups?

A play strategy is proposed to provide play opportunities for a range of age groups within Ballymun. Each age group has its own needs in terms of play requirements and the issue of special needs children must be looked at. In the larger open spaces such as Coultry Park and Poppintree Park a range of ages can be provided for, but in the smaller Local Greens the play areas may be provided to favour younger children who do not roam as far as older children.

Within the play strategy it was also an aim to provide equal play opportunities. Boys may be more attracted to large open space and play equipment because physically and psychologically they have a 'safer' distance to range over, since the outside world is generally seen as being safer for boys than girls. Girls are more attracted to 'wandering about' and to gathering at the edge of open spaces rather than playing on them, and they should be provided for with informal gathering spots.

13.5.1 Toddlers/Pre school -

There is a need to provide secure crèche facilities for this age group, located ideally around the proposed neighbourhood centres.

Children at this age play near other children and learn by watching other children. They need to be supplied with play equipment to stimulate learning and need activities and toys which assist their physical co-ordination and manipulation of objects.

A key is having a safe clean surface and a sense of enclosure with sitting areas provided in sheltered spots for adults to sit while their children play. Access could be limited to children of a certain age range to discourage bullying. This type of play area can be best located close to housing areas within Local Greens and Local Parks.

13.5.2 6 to 12 Years-

At this age children play more as part of groups and start to explore their locality. Social skills are improved and competition and rivalry form part of play, which leads to a need to provide sports grounds. They also need areas to hang out in within each neighbourhood. Play areas which provide challenge and adventure are most popular. These can be located within the larger parks since this group will use all of the locality for play and need stimulating play opportunities outside of formal 'Play Areas'.

The school questionnaire also showed a need to provide open space with tracks where rollerblade and bikes can be used in safety, again this type of track can be provided in the larger open spaces such as Coultry park.

13.5.3 Teenagers-

They may not want formal play areas but look for places they can hang out in and meet in a neutral area, well lit and away from housing. It is an aim to create interesting and if possible overlooked hanging out areas such as stepped banks or groups of informal sitting stones within housing areas and Local parks and Greens.

It is also hoped to provide indoor facilities they can access such as bowling alley's, or leisure centres which have sitting areas/ inexpensive cafes.

13.6 Conclusions

The redevelopment programme can be seen as an opportunity to provide a rich and varied outdoor environment for the youth of Ballymun. While some of the open space will need to be built upon to replace high rise flats with traditional housing in 2-3 storeys, and some small blocks of flats. The purpose and function of the remaining open space needs to be carefully planned within a play, sports and recreation strategy.