EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report comprises The Open Space Assessment and informal recreation study. It forms part of the 'Kilkenny Recreational Needs Study'.

This open space report should be read in conjunction with the Assessment of Formal Sporting Facilities in Kilkenny in order to set out an overall strategy for active and passive recreation in Kilkenny City and County.

The aim of this study is to review the existing open space resource in terms of function and quality, with the objective of establishing what is the existing capacity and potential to meet the city's and county's needs in terms of amenity and recreation and / or alternative uses of dysfunctional spaces as appropriate.
The existing provision is assessed against recognised standards and highlights the shortfall.

The study area covers Kilkenny City and Kilkenny County. As part of the analysis the following have been carried out:-
   (a) On ground analysis,(each site visited)
   (b) desk top studies
   (c) public consultation.

Extensive surveys were carried out for all individual open spaces including waterfront corridors.

The findings of the assessment and analysis are as follows:

Kilkenny City:
1. The open space as defined by the zoning objectives map for KilkennyCity shows a quantity of open space greater than that required by the present standard in the Development Plan.
   Greater than the "Six Acre Standard"

2. The amenity value, the quality and the functionality of the existing spaces is poor.

3. There is no quality play provision within most open spaces surveyed.

4. There is no dedicated department to develop and manage open space within the city and county.

5. Open space resource at a local level requires redesign and redevelopment to maximise its potential and quality.

6. There is a unique water resource both ecological / green and urban / hard associated with the Nore river corridor, with the potential to embellish the image and civic attractions of Kilkenny city.

7. There is a need for a hierarchy of open space provision to ensure a clear function / purpose for each open space provided. This will inform day to day decision making re individual facilities and avoid duplication and / or under-provision.

8. Open space in Kilkenny should provide visual enhancement to the fabric of the city, whether as a recreational amenity or not.

Kilkenny County:
9. County towns are generally well provided for with an attractive surrounding countryside context – walks, natural areas, woodlands etc, and individual sports clubs often have their own facilities, however, in general, each town / village requires consolidation or enhancement of at least one existing green / space or creation of new greens or town parks as a focal point for social and community events and informal provision for miscellaneous recreational activities
General:
10. Kilkenny City and County have no dedicated department to develop and manage open space within the city / county.

11. The issue of public liability should not be a deterrent to providing equipped play areas as long as recently adopted and recognised EU standards are followed.
12. There is a need for a strategic vision of open space in the city and county and its role in
    - The promotion of Kilkenny as a city with a high quality of life.
    - The potential to create networks of open spaces.
    - The development of Kilkenny City, County and the Nore / Barrow region and its niche in the leisure and tourism market, building on it's established heritage attractions.

Recommendations:

Provision of Open Space

1. Adopt an open space strategy for the city and its environs.
2. All policies should be guided by the need to provide a balanced range and hierarchy of open spaces and locations throughout the Study Area and by providing access to all.
3. Communities in the City and County should be involved in an informed way in local redevelopment plans involving improved open space, footpath creation and particularly infill development.
4. Due to the strategic nature of the proposals in Kilkenny City impacting on recreation, housing, community development, urban and economic development, tourism and city image it may be appropriate to set up an interdepartmental task force to direct and manage the recreation strategy.
5. Put in place appropriate cross-departmental structures to manage and develop the open space strategy, and provide sufficient resources to implement it.
6. In consultation with local communities, provide one publicly managed town park or village green in the each county town and village addressed in the Study Area.

Design, Quality and Management of Open Space

7. An immediate priority within the strategy should be to upgrade and facilitate the improved design, maintenance and management of existing open spaces both in the City and County.

Provision of Play Facilities
8. In consultation with communities, plans for the improvement, maintenance and management of local facilities should be developed with an emphasis on the early provision of quality children's play areas.
9. For the provision of Play Areas the City and County Councils should:

    - Adopt EU standard EN 1176 for the design and management of play area equipment.
    - Be directly responsible for the control and management of the play areas unless by agreement with another agency.
    - Should undertake weekly checks on play areas and equipment, carried out by suitably qualified employees.
    - Remove all defective / dangerous equipment immediately and not reinstate until satisfactorily repaired.
    - Maintain records of inspections including dates, personnel and qualifications of inspectors, and necessary actions taken.

Resources
10. The City and County Councils should seek to implement Sections 48 & 49 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, for the purpose of raising funds to, not only provide for, but to also fund the management and maintenance of these amenities. Funding may also be possible from other sources such as SEHB.
11. The Councils should consider whether to impose a flat rate development levy per house to go towards the provision of open space.
12. Where it is possible under these Sections, developers should provide a satisfactory level of open space on site in accordance with best practice including:
    - The amalgamation of open space into useable units.
    - Arrangements of housing to provide maximum surveillance.
    - The enclosure of open space where it abuts a main road.

- The provision of equipped children's play areas.
- The protection of existing landscape features of merit.
- The provision of hard and soft landscape features, furniture and lighting as appropriate.

13. The clustering of open space in City and County areas with other leisure and sports opportunities to maximise usage, efficient use of capital and human resources and management e.g. the location of open space with sports centres.
14. The recognition of the social and cultural benefits of providing open space to capture available funds from non-traditional agencies e.g. Urban Woodland Schemes, Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation.
15. The Councils should develop management, maintenance and access agreements with what is classified as private space with open access - schools, community run facilities, hospital or college / institutional grounds – to develop and realise the potential of these often quality and mature environments as informal passive recreational areas.

Redesign and Redevelopment

16. In the City and County consider the use of infill built development to reconfigure / structure open space in accordance with best practice for open spaces and urban design.
17. Such redevelopment coupled with public/private partnerships and further public investment should create additional resources to address the upgrade of open space within the City and County.

Strategic Vision

18. The existing River network has potentially established the basis for a network and links County with City, tourism features and existing recreation facilities.
19. Link the development of a green city and leisure facilities with tourism programmes and opportunities e.g the Nore Waterway Corridor and city centre initiatives such as the Batemans Quay. (Kilkenny, The Medieval City, in sitting in a beautiful, cared for, wooded, riverside environment).
20. Consider jetties and boating facilities in the city centre to bring the river to life.
21. Identify walking and cycling routes linked to open spaces and facilities to develop "greenways" and Sli na Slainte routes e.g. the city centre and interconnecting riverside walks out to the countryside.
22. To upgrade existing and provide new riverside walks as shown on City Map 5.
23. To preserve existing rights of ways in City and County especially those along the river.

Hierarchy

24. Proposals should be prepared for the development of existing open spaces in the City as high quality district, city and regional parks.
25. Provide facilities to enable a greater range of activities be provided i.e. skateboarding, rollerblading and such activities that may become popular and which could be accommodated within the proposed park network. This will ensure maximum potential is realised in the parks and open space system.
26. It is important to integrate city based leisure and tourism proposals with those in the county and region. This will maximise the value derived from recreation investment by enhancing the city and county not just for residents but for visitors also.

Open space provides a green lung for the urban area and green networks are important for future economic and social well-being. However the benefits of open space are severely compromised if the spaces are neglected or undeveloped. Open spaces will only bring benefit if they are of a high quality, managed and maintained.

The fundamental importance of open space, over and above sport and recreation must be recognised in order to bring better quality of life and encourage an urban renaissance. Open spaces significantly enhance the liveability of urban environments. Allowing successful establishment of an open space network will serve the city and it's population in a multitude of ways: including health, education and tourism, whilst also bringing socio economic benefits. The role of open space in providing a facility for informal recreation must be recognised, as this is more broadly relevant to the population. A minority of park visitors use parks for formal sport and demographically the ageing population means there will be fewer participants in active recreation.

Open space is not an 'add on' to recreation, it is where recreation, sport and social activities take place.