

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) Open Space Strategy Consultation, 2022 to 2026

Response from the Commissioner for Older People for Northern
Ireland

March 2022

LCCC Open Space Strategy Consultation

1. Introduction

In November 2018, the Development Committee agreed to an assessment of open space for the Local Development Plan, in order to gain evidence in relation to the quality, quantity and accessibility or distribution of open space across the area.

The Open Space Strategy seeks to secure best value and provide a prioritised framework for investment, maintenance and management.

Aim:

- Enable Leisure & Community Wellbeing to prioritise improvement
- Create a reliable and up-to-date evidence base of parks and open spaces
- Transformation Directorate will utilise the evidence to support the LDP

Best practice UK guidance recommends that a strategy should comprise:

1. a vision for open space and strategic principles
2. an audit of existing open space provision
3. an assessment of current and future requirements
4. a strategy with an action plan, developed in partnership with the Planning Unit.

We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey.

2. Respondent information

1. Response on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland (COPNI)

Address:

Commissioner for Older People Northern Ireland (COPNI)

Equality House,

7-9 Shaftesbury Square,

Belfast, BT2 7DP

2. Age range

60 +

3. Gender

NA

4. Do you consider yourself to have a disability? If yes please provide detail below

NA

5. Are you a member of a community group? If yes please provide the name below

NA

6. What do you mainly use our outdoor spaces for? Please select all that apply

NA

3. The Benefits of the Great Outdoors

7. Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way you use your local open spaces? Please provide details.

How has it changed?

Older Persons in Northern Ireland have been adversely affected by the impact of Covid-19. Between 1 March 2020 and 31 October 2021, of the 3692 covid related deaths over 93.4 per cent were people aged over 60. The impact of covid is evident not only on physical health and longevity, but also upon people's mental health. According to a recent report by the Campaign to End Loneliness, 71% of people in NI are worried about someone they know being lonely during the winter months because of the Covid-19 restrictions and 88% of people in NI say loneliness has become a bigger problem since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic².

The development of more and improved open and green spaces, have the potential to help address some of the issues caused by the pandemic such as increased feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Evidence of the accessing open and green spaces is evident in a recent report by Public Health Scotland, who found that there had been a marked increase in the use of outdoor and green spaces during the pandemic and that 9 in 10 individuals agreed that being in green and open spaces benefitted their mental health³.

However, the report also found that there were inequalities in use of green and open spaces, and these may have widened during the pandemic and more interventions to increase use of green and open space should ensure a focus on disadvantaged groups.

1. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/covid-19-related-deaths-northern-ireland-october-2021>
2. <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-in-Northern-Ireland-A-Call-to-action.pdf>
3. https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_805950_smxx.pdf

8. Do you agree with the vision for the Open Space Strategy? It is:

"The city, towns, villages and suburbs of Lisburn and Castlereagh will enjoy a range of attractive and accessible parks and open spaces close to where people live. 'Flagship' parks, greenspaces and play areas will draw local residents and visitors to both urban and rural centres, providing places for social interaction, play, sport, recreation and quality of life for all.

"Existing open spaces will be protected and enhanced to diversify urban habitats and extend the green network. Where possible, open spaces will be linked by a network of paths and green corridors to encourage active travel, healthier lifestyles and exploration of the outdoors."

COPNI welcomes the strategy and its potential to help all members of society. COPNI would like to see greater inclusion of measures relating to Age Friendly practices. We would recommend that any future developments are undertaken considering the World Health Organisation's (WHO) principles and guidance on outdoor spaces.

COPNI is aware that LCCC has in the last few years launched both an Age Friendly Strategy, and an Age Friendly Alliance (AFA) and COPNI would be encouraged to see direct application of Age Friendly principles within the strategy and consultation with the LCCC's AFA on the proposed outcomes of the strategy.

9. Do you support the six Strategic Principles for the Open Space Strategy detailed on consultation board 4?

COPNI agrees with the strategic principles but would also like to see reference to the inclusion and specific needs of older persons. As LCCC will be aware, according to the most recent population projections for 2022, 24.3 per cent of its residents are over 60. By contrast, for 2022 the population of persons under 18 is projected to be 35,208 which is 23.4 per cent.

10. Has the Action Plan captured the main open space priorities for your area? Please provide details below.

If you want to see the Action Plan for Lisburn North, Lisburn South and Castlereagh East please look at consultation board 9.

If you want to see the Action Plan for Downshire East, Downshire West, Killultagh and Castlereagh South please look at consultation board 10.

There would seem to be a range of improvements to benefit the whole community. Again, COPNI would ask that LCCC ensures that these developments are carried out with Age Friendly principles in mind, ensuring adequate seating and toilet provision is available.

11. Which area do you live in?

NA

12. What improvements to open spaces in your area would you suggest?

COPNI would reiterate the need to include Age Friendly principles in all projects and future planning and be conscious of the positive impact that the provision of outdoor and green spaces can have on older persons.

13. Please leave any further comments below.

Accessible outdoor spaces have the potential to improve the lives of older persons. COPNI welcomes LCCC's measures to improve its existing open spaces and hopes that these will also help to improve the lives of older people in the area.