

## **CHAPTER 10: RECREATION, THE GREEN BELT AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

This chapter looks at the role of recreation, the Green Belt and community facilities within the study area. Taking each issue in turn, it reviews current policy and provision, and then sets out the preferred scenario.

### **10.1 Recreation and the Green Belt**

#### **10.1.1 Introduction**

The study area is characterised by open fields predominantly in agricultural use, much of which is used by the local population as informal recreation space. However, more formal leisure space can be found immediately to the north of the M50, with the provision of playing fields and golf courses. The area is therefore designated either as Objective B land (agriculture, and rural amenity) or Green Belt (greenbelt, urban and rural amenity and agriculture). The following section looks at the area's future role, in the context of further airport development.

#### **10.1.2 Open space and recreation**

The recent SRUNA study, which covered the area bounded by the existing noise contour line, recognised the study area and environs as a natural and cultural asset. The area was considered to have significant potential for sustainable recreation and tourism-related development having regard to its location adjoining an expanding city and airport region, and given its predominantly undeveloped nature.

The countryside has not been developed to date because of a lack of mains drainage and because of restrictions associated with the operation of Dublin Airport. In the near future drainage constraints will no longer apply. According the SRUNA report, this will significantly increase the development potential and pressure on ~~of~~ the area.

Fingal plays an essential role in not just the provision of recreational facilities for local use, but provides facilities for the wider region; and in particular for organisations, clubs and societies that are located in Dublin City who need to lease facilities on the edge of the City.

The SRUNA study identified that parts of the area are extensively used for different forms of active recreational use both indoor and outdoor: golf courses and golf driving ranges, football, hockey, karting, shooting, cycling, athletics, road running, swimming, jogging and horse riding. However, the area does not have a strong focus for passive recreation i.e. walking, wildlife appreciation or cultural pursuits – there are no country parks or coherent footpath networks. The location of the facilities is mapped in Appendix 6.

The SRUNA study included a sample survey of recreational facility providers and users. The users viewed the area very positively describing it as uncrowded, safe and suitable for children, accessible litter free. Noise emerged as the most significant problem. Providers also gave positive responses - the main advantages for locating in the area were stated as being in the countryside; and adjacent to major centres of population; and the motorway. Disadvantages included poor public transport provision; aircraft noise; and restrictions on further development.

The forecast population growth and increasing affluence will result in greater demand on leisure and recreational sports facilities, on open spaces and on the countryside adjoining Dublin City. The effect of this is the need to protect the countryside and ensure the sustainable use of the natural assets. All providers surveyed for SRUNA envisaged their facility expanding over the next 5 years.

In the view of the SRUNA study, although parts of the study area will be required for airport-related development, the remaining area to the north, east and west of the airport has great potential for recreational growth.

### **10.1.3 The Role of the Green Belt in South Fingal**

The north and east of the area are designated as Green Belt. Historically Green Belts were designated at a local level, limited in number and extent, with the sole objective of “protecting and enhancing the open nature of lands between urban areas”. However the CDP 1999-2004 provides for much more extensive green belts than previous plans, and these “will now play a major strategic role in the development of the county” (p33 County Development Plan).

The Plan notes that there is a need to provide visual breaks between urban areas and a long-term need to limit the growth into the countryside of existing built up areas. As such, green belts should provide for the urban population, for outdoor sport and recreation and the retention of attractive landscapes. The ‘buffer zone’ they create also helps protect agricultural land from urban generated pressures.

The Plan argues that to serve these functions, the number and extent of Green Belts needs to be increased and the CDP zones these areas as ‘*Objective H – to provide for a green belt and to provide for urban and rural amenities and agriculture*’.

The Green Belt within the study area is identified as separating the major development areas of Dublin City, the South Fingal Fringe (including the airport) and Blanchardstown from the remainder of the County. It also separates Swords and Malahide, and Portmarnock and Baldoyle from the City and South Fingal Fringe and the rural areas, as well as separating Swords from the Airport.

The prime objective of the designation is to provide a visual break between and around development areas.

In addition the Plan notes that Green Belts should satisfy the following objectives:

- Access to the open countryside for the urban population
- Outdoor sport and recreation
- Protection of agricultural land
- Available mix of land uses within the areas
- Urban forestry/woodland
- Retention of ‘demesne’ type landscapes

Proposals for development in these areas must demonstrate that they contribute to these objectives.

The Plan sets out uses that will be considered appropriate in the Green Belt:

- Provision of a tourism/recreational complex is considered in principle to meet the objectives of areas zoned as Objective H. The planning authority will actively seek the location of such facilities in these zones, except in areas of sensitive landscapes.
- Single agricultural related dwellings
- Replacement dwellings in specified circumstances
- Agri-business in specified circumstances
- Parkland golf courses, subject to design considerations
- Urban forestry

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) and the new Draft Fingal Development Plan (section 9.1) also set out information on the purposes of Green Belts. The RPGs (section 9.7, p. 163) list the main regional purposes:

- Provide for the establishment of visual breaks between and around urban settlement character areas to restrict the uneven expansion of large built-up area and to safeguard the countryside from encroachment of development.
- Facilitate the provision of opportunities for access to the open countryside for use of recreational and visual amenity purposes.
- Seek the improvement of damaged and derelict land around built-up areas.
- Seek the protection of land for agricultural, forestry and related uses from urban generated pressures.
- Secure the preservation of the setting and special character of historic towns.
- Assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land therefore reducing the pressure on development within green belts.

The RPGs also stress that “the essential characteristic of green belts is their permanence”, and this is a clear argument in favour of defensible boundaries with some visible reflection on the ground. Similarly, the DFDP (p.149), noting that the land use zoning objective pertaining to greenbelt areas is ‘GB’ – ‘To protect and provide for a greenbelt to demarcate the urban and rural area and provide for agriculture and amenity in a manner that protects the physical and visual amenity of the area’, argues that: “for a greenbelt to effectively perform any of the functions outlined above it must display certain characteristics. A greenbelt should have a ‘critical mass’, permanence is an essential ingredient to its function, and the boundaries must be recognisable, rational and defensible.”

#### **10.1.4 Rural Land**

The Objective B zone – protected for agriculture and rural amenity - covers the part of the study area to the south of the airport. Any extension of the airport operational area between the runways and the zoning for other uses to the south would remove the majority of this zoning and a number of recreational facilities would need to be relocated.

Other sports facilities are either not available to the public (for example the Aer Rianta pitch complex to the east of the M1) or under threat (such as the smaller pitches along the M50 extension which have been rezoned for industrial uses, although they have not been developed yet).

### 10.1.5 Proposed Scenario

It is recommended that Green Belt status be confirmed for the great majority of the area to the east, north and west of the airport; and for that part of the area to the south where there seems to be a defensible long-term boundary which will retain an open feel around the small settlement of Baleskin/Dubber. This will ensure that the physical and visual break between urban and rural areas is maintained. It also allows for the promotion of development for rural and urban amenity for the community at large, and agricultural uses with recreational uses being identified in the most accessible areas.

In the eastern half of this “M50 Belt”, the open character is already compromised by commercial development; the firm proposals for road improvements and Metro construction, and the longer-term prospect of a Metro-focussed development, mean that Green Belt notation is not really appropriate. The new draft Development Plan (Map Sheet No 9) allocates this area mostly as “Objective RU” to protect agriculture and rural amenity (as former Objective B); this seems a reasonable approach pending the development of a detailed local plan in relation to the potential of an eventual Metro Station (see 7.7.3 above).

The ERM study of Airport Safety Zones (see Chapter 5 above) recommends that low intensity uses, which avoid concentration of population density and substantial buildings or structures, may be permitted within the safety zones. Subject to restrictions, this will allow uses such as agriculture, sports grounds and informal amenity areas; the safety zones will therefore exhibit many of the characteristics associated with the green belt/rural area.

Existing non-agricultural and recreational uses should be permitted to carry out improvements where necessary as long as this does not result in intensification of development.

This type of designation has occurred in Lea Valley in northwest London. The area successfully provides a buffer between two developed areas and includes elements of contained industrial development and the train track, but is dominated by large areas of public open space which includes pockets of natural wildlife reserves and sports facilities, as shown in Figure 10.1.

The area between the main runway and M50 / city edge needs particular attention. It currently functions largely as a landscape buffer and rural area, publicly accessible and of some recreational and environmental value – it already contains a significant number of sports pitches and playing fields. It can continue to play this role in future, but the eastern parts as noted, will change in character over time: in the short to medium term, its current role will continue to apply to almost all of this belt. In the longer term, open space and recreation may be combined with other development roles (see Chapters 6 and 7 above).

In the meantime, and even with these uncertainties, there is no reason why this area should be allowed to decline into untidy urban fringe. Therefore, to maximise its potential value - in amenity terms, for recreational users and eventually for investors - it is recommended that an environmental improvement/landscape enhancement study should be carried out. This would propose a planting and layout strategy which would (a) provide a strong landscape structure for whatever future is eventually decided, and (b) guide investment in planting and recreation areas wherever this could be done without compromising growth choices.



Figure 10.1  
Lea Valley, London  
South Fingal Planning Study

## **10.2 Community Facilities**

### **10.2.1 Current policy and provision**

Community facilities, as set out in the review of the CDP, include schools, colleges, libraries, childcare facilities, crèches and local and community services (such as post offices, banking facilities, youth club and meeting spaces). The airport currently has a chapel and health facility. The growth of the airport may generate a need for more community facilities, such as health facilities, childcare provision, chapels etc. within the airport operational area principally to serve employees. The need for such facilities will effectively double if a second terminal is built. However, this is a matter for Aer Rianta, and does not represent a policy choice for this study.

There are very few community facilities within the study area because of its rural character. St Margaret's has a school, health centre and chapel, and Balgriffin has a college and chapel. Outside the study area facilities are clustered in Kinsealy, and Rivermeade (Owens Bridge) has a school. There are also two cemeteries at Collinstown and Balgriffin (see Figure 1, Appendix 6).

In theory, study area demand for community facilities will be driven from the existing and proposed residential community. As discussed in Chapter 9, further residential development in the study area would not be recommended, because of worsening environmental conditions, the need to reserve land for airport related growth and the need to continue to direct further growth to existing development centres. Any new demand can therefore be assumed to drive from existing residents' identified needs.

There are a number of centres outside the study area that have been zoned for Objective RV1 – to provide or improve village services to meet local needs or Objective NC - to protect, provide for and improve local/neighbourhood centres. These include Kinsealy, Ballymun (NCB) and Rivermead. In accordance with the area plans, community facilities should continue to be encouraged within these zones to meet the need of existing residents.

However, in the case of the only two settlements within the study area of sufficient size to generate the need for further facilities, St Margaret's, (where the residential future of the area is uncertain), and Balgriffin, (where the majority of which falls just outside the study area) are not the subject of any specifically identified needs. It is not therefore envisaged that there is a need for the plan to make such provision.

### **10.2.2 Proposed Scenario**

It is recommended that, within the study area, further community facilities outside St Margaret's and Balgriffin are unlikely to be necessary and should not be permitted. Facilities should be located in existing centres to decrease the need for users to travel and to support existing functions. Within St Margaret's (if the area remains a populated centre) and Balgriffin, facilities should be provided within the developed settlement envelopes according to identified need. The on-airport provision, as noted at 10.1 above, is a special case, which can be treated as ancillary to the main activity on the site, further provision will need to be identified in the Airport Action Plan.

The map should not identify any additional sites zoned for community related uses. Any need for further facilities in St Margaret's will be investigated as part of the further consultation on the growth of the settlement.