



# Recreation and Amenity Needs Study

Galway City Council

## Staidéar Riachtanas Áineasa & Conláistí

Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe





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# Galway City Recreation and Amenity Needs Study

## Galway City Council

Adopted by Members of Galway City Council on the 28th January 2008

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# Contents

Page

List of Maps  
List of Figures

1  
1

## 1.0 Introduction

2

## 2.0 Executive Summary

3

## 3.0 Background

5

3.1 Purpose of the Study

5

3.2 The City

5

3.3 The Area

6

3.4 Population

7

3.5 National Trends Affecting Recreation and Sports Participation

7

3.6 Summary

8

## 4.0 Surveys

10

4.1 Methodologies

10

4.2 Open Space Audit

10

4.3 Ecological Audit

16

4.4 Water Based Amenity Audit

21

4.5 Sports Audit

24

4.6 Open Space User Survey

28

4.7 Sports Facility User Survey

30

4.8 Household Survey

33

## 5.0 Policy Review

36

5.1 Policy Review

36

## 6.0 Assessment

40

6.1 Open Space Assessment

41

6.2 Ecological Assessment

43

6.3 Water Based Amenity Assessment

48

6.4 Sports Assessment

49

## 7.0 Consultation

60

7.1 The Consultation

60

7.2 The Consultation Process

60

7.3 The Consultees

61

7.4 Issues Arising From The Consultation

61

INTRODUCTION

SURVEYS

ANALYSIS

<b>8.0</b>	<b>Current and Future Needs</b>	64
8.1	Open Space Needs	65
8.2	Ecological Needs	70
8.3	Water Based Amenity Needs	71
8.4	Sports Facility Needs	72
8.5	Summary	77

<b>9.0</b>	<b>Proposed Policies, Actions &amp; Implementation</b>	79
9.1	Proposed Policies and Actions	79
9.2	Implementation, Monitoring and Funding	91

## Appendices

<b>Appendix 1.</b>	List of Documents Consulted	93
<b>Appendix 2.</b>	Groups and Organisations Consulted	96
<b>Appendix 3.</b>	List of Submissions Received	101
<b>Appendix 4.</b>	Glossary	104
<b>Appendix 5.</b>	Maps	107
	A4 Version of Map 4 - Proposed Natural Heritage Areas	
	A4 Version of Map 5 - Candidate Areas of Conservation	
	A4 Version of Map 6 - Special Protection Areas	
	A4 Version of Map 7 - Areas of Local Ecological Importance	
	A3 Version of Map 20 - Catchment Areas of Local Neighbourhood and City Parks Map	

## List of Maps

Map 1	The Study Area.
Map 2	Open Space and Sports Facilities Survey Locations.
Map 3	Existing Parks - Areas Zoned Recreation and Amenity (RA) and Agriculture and High Amenity (G) - and Greenways, Pedestrian and Cycleways.
Map 4	Proposed Natural Heritage Areas.
Map 4 (A4)	Proposed Natural Heritage Areas.
Map 5	Candidate Special Areas of Conservation.
Map 5 (A4)	Candidate Special Areas of Conservation.
Map 6	Special Protection Areas.
Map 6 (A4)	Special Protection Areas.
Map 7	Areas of Local Ecological Importance.
Map 7 (A4)	Areas of Local Ecological Importance.
Map 8	Ecological Survey Locations.
Map 9	Protected Views.
Map 10	Water-Based Recreation Facilities.
Map 11	Slipways and Mooring Points.
Map 12	GAA/Soccer/Rugby and Informal Playing Pitches.
Map 13	Sports Halls and Gyms.
Map 14	Public Sports Facilities – No Membership Required.
Map 15	Sports Facilities Hierarchy.
Map 16	GAA/Soccer/Rugby and Informal Playing Pitches – Accessibility.
Map 17	Sports Halls and Gyms Accessibility.
Map 18	Facilities under Construction or “In Planning”.
Map 19	Five Survey Areas.
Map 20 (A4)	Catchment areas of Local, Neighbourhood and City Parks.
Map 20 (A3)	Catchment areas of Local, Neighbourhood and City Parks.

## List of Figures

Figure 1	Open Space Hierarchy.
Figure 2	Five Sites Surveyed under the Ecological Audit.
Figure 3	Sports Facilities.
Figure 4	Characteristics of Those Using Open Space.
Figure 5	Main Characteristics of Open Space Usage.
Figure 6	Satisfaction Levels for Each Open Space/Amenity Surveyed.
Figure 7	Characteristics of Those Using Sports Facilities.
Figure 8	Main Characteristics of Sports Facility Usage.
Figure 9	Main Reasons for Non-Participation in Passive/Active Recreation.
Figure 10	Findings on Information and Awareness.
Figure 11	Assessment Methodologies.
Figure 12	Local Authority Pitches - A Comparison With Other Cities.
Figure 13	The Consultation Process.
Figure 14	Issues Arising from the Consultation.
Figure 15	The Five Sub Areas.
Figure 16	Quantative Need Identified by the Six Acre Standard (NPFA, England 2002).
Figure 17	Future Public Open Space Requirements According to Sub Area.
Figure 18	Future public Open Space Land Requirements for Future Development in the Using the Six Acre Standard as a Guideline.
Figure 19	Current Demand for GAA, Soccer, Rugby, Indoor Hall, Gym and Swimming Pool Activities.
Figure 20	Future Requirements - Sports Facilities.



# Introduction

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# 1.0 | Introduction

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the City's Recreation and Amenity Needs Study.

This Study is a requirement of the City Development Plan 2005 – 2011 which is a pivotal document in the future development of the city. Active and passive recreation and consideration of amenity form an important part of the City Development Plan. It is right that this should be the case as recreation, both active and passive, and enjoyment of the beautiful setting and amenity features of our city, form an important part of Galway citizens' lives.

Whether it is walking, cycling or jogging along the River Corrib or our splendid seafront, participating in swimming, soccer, GAA, water sports, or simply children at play, recreation is an increasingly important part of the lives of those that live in, work in or visit the city. This is especially important given our participation in the WHO Healthy Cities Project. It is essential that we not only meet current needs but that we also plan ahead to meet future needs, especially given the rapid growth of our population.

Galway enjoys a unique natural setting capable of supporting an exciting array of sports and recreational activities. Careful planning and management will allow a sustainable balance to be achieved, between our current and future recreation needs, with the proper protection and management of our natural heritage assets which we must pass on to future generations. Such planning and management will encourage a mutually beneficial relationship to be developed between these two aims.

In planning ahead we should not forget the significant progress made in the past, reflected in the City Development Plan, the City Parks and Amenities Strategy, Galway as a Child Friendly City, the City Habitats Inventory and the City Development Board Strategy 'Gaillimh Beo agus Bríomhar'. This Study complements and builds further upon policies and strategies outlined in each of these documents. It identifies and assesses both Galway's existing open space amenity network and sports infrastructure, and targets areas for further improvement based on our current and projected future needs. It also identifies potential opportunities for delivery.

The policies and actions set out in this document are ambitious and pose a significant challenge for the City Council in terms of financial and staff resources. However, they also form a basis and a direction that a growing city like Galway must endeavour to achieve.

I am confident that the strategy identifies the Recreation and Amenity needs of the city and sets out strategic policies and deliverable actions designed to meet current and future needs with measurable indicators of success.

I acknowledge the technical assistance provided by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds in the production of this document.

I wish you continued enjoyment in your recreational and amenity based pursuits.

Yours,

Joe MacGrath  
City Manager



## 2.0 | Executive Summary

This Recreation and Amenity Needs Study is the culmination of extensive consultation at all levels, a thorough review of national and local policy and an extensive assessment of the city's amenity open space, ecological sites, water based amenities and sports facilities.

**There are seven principles as follows:**

### **STRATEGIC PROVISION**

Provision of amenities & facilities in locations where there are currently deficits and spare capacity and where significant population growth or development is anticipated.

### **GUARDIANSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Ensure the city's identified natural/semi natural resources are managed in a sustainable manner, whilst optimising their potential as both environmental assets and recreational resources.

### **UTILISATION**

Improve current utilisation through improved use of existing facilities and streamlined maintenance & management.

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Implement measures to increase accessibility for all user groups to a diverse range of recreation and open space facilities.

### **DELIVERY MECHANISMS**

When other avenues of opportunity are exhausted, develop new amenities and facilities.

### **COORDINATION AND PARTNERSHIP**

Ensure that all providers work together to meet current and future needs.

### **PROMOTION**

Promote an awareness of Galway's unique natural resources, recreational facilities and involvement in the WHO Healthy Cities Project as well as promotion of Galway as a "Child Friendly City" and as a NSS "Gateway".

**The main findings are as follows:**

- Galway, when compared with other Irish cities, is at a comparatively early stage in the development of a hierarchy or framework for delivery and maintenance of passive and active recreation facilities and amenities.
- The City Council have made significant progress in developing a parks hierarchy and have invested substantial financial resources into developing the city's parks.
- The sites and areas covered by ecological designations form an important component of the city's recreational assets.
- The Study seeks to achieve a sustainable balance between meeting future recreational needs (both passive and active) and the preservation of the city's ecological and cultural heritage.

- The city's recreational needs have been identified in the Study. To meet these needs a series of integrated strategic policies and proposed actions specific to open space amenity; ecology; water based amenities; and sports facilities have been formulated, set against a level of priority with potential delivery partners identified.
- Although there is limited available and up to date relevant national policy, the City Council have an extensive range of local policy documents relating to recreation and amenity provision.
- There is a significant water amenity resource in the city that is largely underused and for which proposed actions are identified.
- Existing facilities and amenities need to be marketed and promoted more vigorously in the context of a defined marketing strategy.
- A green network is currently being developed as it is essential that all elements of the parks hierarchy and open space amenity are physically linked by direct and safe routes and by sustainable forms of transport. This will mean that there will be full spatial coverage of parks and open space amenities which will be accessible to residents, workers and visitors throughout the city and environs.
- The intention is to ensure that maximum use is made of parks and amenity open space, at all levels of the parks hierarchy, by catering for both active and passive recreation, developing an events programme and enhancing amenities in each park.
- The value, role and potential of parks and amenities at all levels will be greatly enhanced by masterplans, management plans and guidelines.
- The purpose of the masterplans is to maximise value from available committed funds and lands for parks and open spaces. Proposed actions for masterplans seek to reconcile strategic and local needs, identify implementation mechanisms and phase provision.
- Management plans will ensure that parks and open spaces are delivered and operated to best management standards.
- Guidelines are advocated to promote best practice and to indicate where particular expertise may be necessary for project development.
- The Study will inform policy making for future City Development Plans.
- The Study will be continually reviewed for performance against measurable criteria.

## 3.0 Background

### 3.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the Study, as set out in the brief to the consultants was as follows:

1	Consult as widely and extensively as possible to establish attitudes and expectations for passive and active recreation.
2	Identify current and future needs taking into account existing and anticipated population growth, density and profiles across the city and demographic changes such as substantial in-migration, falling household size and catchment areas of existing and proposed facilities.
3	Identify and evaluate recreation opportunities while managing and enhancing natural heritage and biodiversity.
4	Identify key considerations in developing passive and active recreation catering for alternative activities and multi-functionality of facilities.
5	Seek to fully utilise the potential of waterways and the coastline for the sustainable development of recreation and amenity while protecting and enhancing their overall character, amenity and ecological value.
6	Consider the likely future development of Ardaun.
7	Consider the implications of Galway City's designation as a "Gateway" in the National Spatial Strategy.
8	Consider Galway City's role as a major tourist destination.
9	Consider the impact of the relocation of clubs / sports facilities to outlying areas.
10	Consider recreational facilities located outside the city but used by its residents and visitors.
11	Consider the role of the County Council and the potential of the environs to assist in meeting the recreational needs of the city.
12	Determine resources needed for developing and managing existing and proposed passive and active recreation.
13	Assess the role of stakeholders.
14	Identify joint initiatives with recreation and amenity providers and landowners.
15	Acknowledge the increased role of the private sector in the provision of recreational facilities.

### 3.2 The City

Galway City is located in close proximity to Connemara where the River Corrib meets Galway Bay.

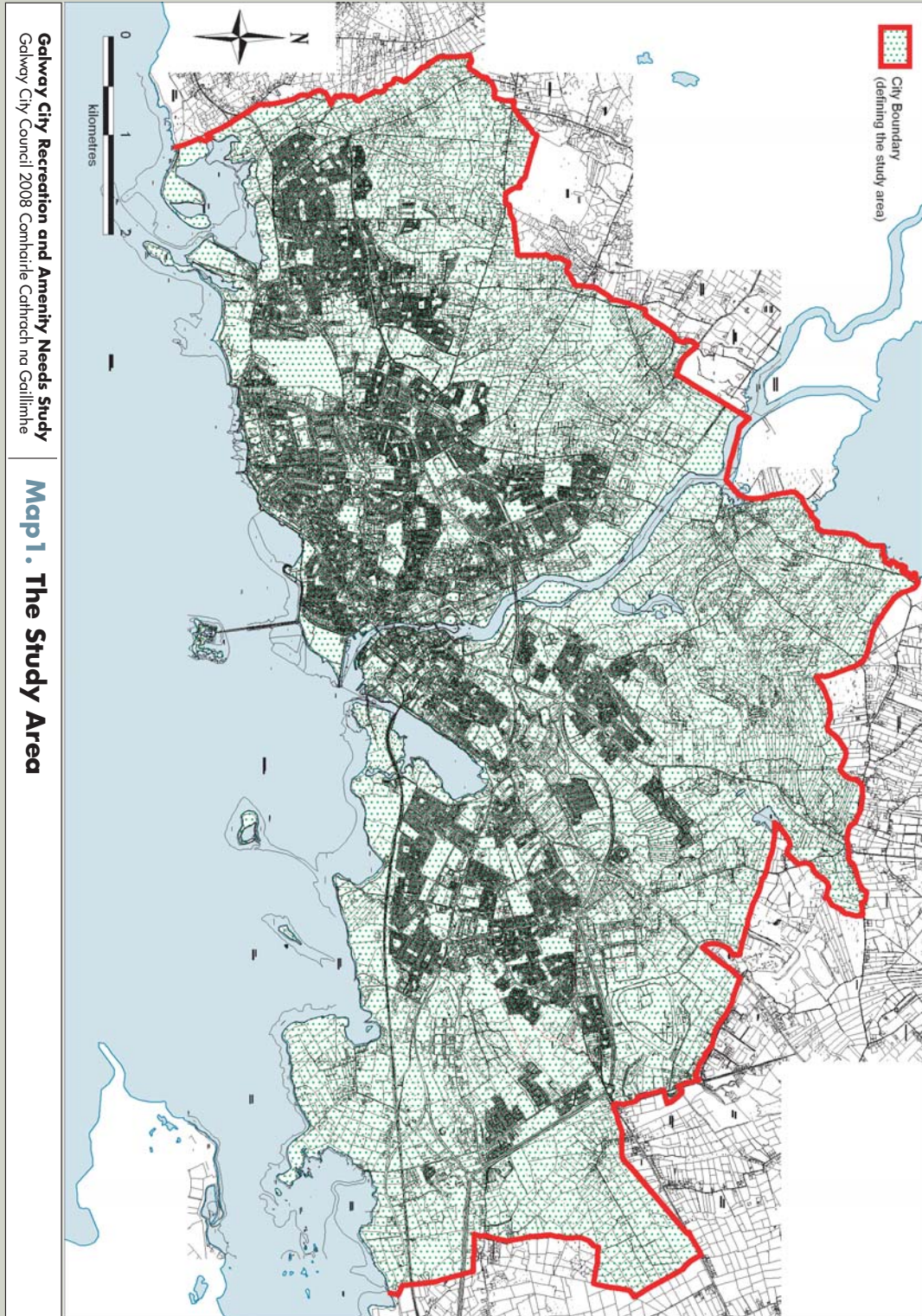
The city has a diversity of open spaces and recreation amenities including a hierarchy of public parks and civic spaces and a range of open spaces within residential, commercial and institutional areas. The recent enhancement of Eyre Square (Kennedy Park) strengthens its role as the primary civic space in Galway City. River, coastal and woodland walkways and scenic views also add to the amenities of the city. There is also a range of sports facilities catering for active recreation.

A unique aspect of Galway's diverse landscape is its extensive coastline with a series of water bodies including Lough Corrib, the River Corrib and canal systems. A substantial amount of lands in the city are in a natural state or semi-natural in character. The city also contains an extensive range of natural heritage areas of international and national importance. Areas of ecological importance have also been identified for their biodiversity value at local level.

Within Galway City, a green network is being developed to allow for the sustainable use and management of both natural heritage and recreation amenity areas in an integrated manner. This green network also allows for nature protection and for the enhancement and expansion of passive and active recreation opportunities in tandem with the expansion of the city.

### 3.3 The Study Area

The Study area is the administrative area of Galway City Council and is shown in Map 1 below.





The city environs (the area located outside the city boundary) also provide facilities and amenities for residents and visitors. Such facilities and amenities include Rinville Park which is jointly owned by Galway City Council and Galway County Council.

### 3.4 Population

The population of Galway City at the time of the 2006 census was 72,414. The population of the County at the same time was 159,256. Of this 159,256 some 62,238 live within the environs of the city which is calculated to be 30 minutes drive time from the city centre. The city's status as a regional centre is also noteworthy as an employment and tourist centre.

#### Population Growth

Galway city has grown by nearly a quarter in the 10 year period 1996 – 2006. This was exceptional and almost unparalleled within the State. This growth was most significant in the period 1996 – 2002 (15%) and remained high in the period 2002 – 2006 (10%). Over the same periods growth in Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford cities was significantly less and in the case of Cork had declined.

#### Age Profile

Analysis of the city's age profile shows almost a quarter of the city's population aged 15 – 24 years with a further 35% in the 25 – 44 age group. The proportion of the city's population in the 15 – 24 age group (24%), significantly exceeds the average in the State (16%). The 45 – 64 age group accounts for a further 17% of the city's population, while 8% were in the 65+ age group. The age profile determines the level of participation likely in recreation and sport with an emphasis on the former towards the later years of life and greater participation in sport for younger people (Sports Participation and Health Among Adults in Ireland ESRI, 2004).

#### Socio-Economic

A further determination of participation is the socio-economic profile of the city's population. These figures show that just under a third of the city's population in 2006, falls within categories A (employers and managers), B (higher level professionals) and C (lower level professionals) of the census' socio-economic status. Research has shown that people in these categories are twice as likely to participate in sport and recreation as those in groups D (non-manual) and E (semi-skilled), (Sports Participation and Health Among Adults in Ireland. ESRI, 2004).

#### Foreign Nationals

The population in Galway has seen a growth in foreign nationals as evidenced in the 2006 census which places at 18% the number of foreign nationals resident in Galway city. A relatively substantial influx has occurred from eastern and northern Europe in particular, but also from Asia, South America and Africa, all of which will have implications for participation in recreation and in activities becoming more varied in the future.

### 3.5 National Trends Affecting Recreation and Sports Participation

There are significant social changes occurring generally which will determine future participation in recreation and sport and ultimately the provision of facilities and amenities.

Significant among these are the changing status and structures of the family and a trend towards activities undertaken by the individual as opposed to being formally undertaken in a group or team. An increase in single parent families places a burden on obtaining childminders which inhibits participation of guardians / parents. A trend towards getting married and having children later in life affects participation in sport in particular as research indicates that older parents are less likely to participate in sport with their children.

Changing work patterns, including a move away from the traditional 9 to 5 working day and the traditional Monday to Friday working week have a significant bearing on recreation and sports participation. People frequently say they are too busy and have no time for activities outside work. Allied to this is a trend in increased consumerism which also determines participation towards 'fashionable' or 'trendy' activities.

Lifestyle changes such as income and diet affect one's health, which are both cause and effect of reduced participation in recreation and sport. The health benefits of participation in recreation and sport are increasingly recognised and bring benefits of improved fitness, stress reduction and improved well-being.

### **3.6 Summary**

Galway's population growth has been significant and continues albeit at a reduced rate. The changing demographics should be reflected in the provision of facilities emphasising the needs of the very young and of an increasingly ageing population, as well as meeting the socio-economic and increasingly multi-cultural needs of the city's population. There should therefore be a balance between providing passive and active amenities for well-ness, health and fitness and individual activities as well as formal or team facilities.

# Surveys



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## 4.0 | Surveys

### 4.1 | Methodologies

An extensive audit of open spaces, ecologically important areas, water based amenities and sports facilities has been undertaken. This has been conducted to available recognised standards. To supplement this information and to further assist in identifying current and future needs we have also conducted a number of user surveys amongst those utilising open space, amenity areas and sports facilities. An extensive household questionnaire was also undertaken.

In regard to the field surveys, (Sections 4.2 to 4.5 below) appropriate information was gathered depending on the category of the amenity/facility. Whilst each audit was clearly tailored to the requirements of assessing the amenity/ facility there were some common elements between the templates in recognition of the fact that there is a considerable overlap of function between open space and formal sports facilities. For example, playing pitches are not only open spaces but also formal sports facilities. Definitions of open space were sufficiently broad to allow for a common scoring system between amenities.

All audit, user survey and household survey questionnaire forms used during the Study are available from the City Council and on [www.galwaycity.ie](http://www.galwaycity.ie).

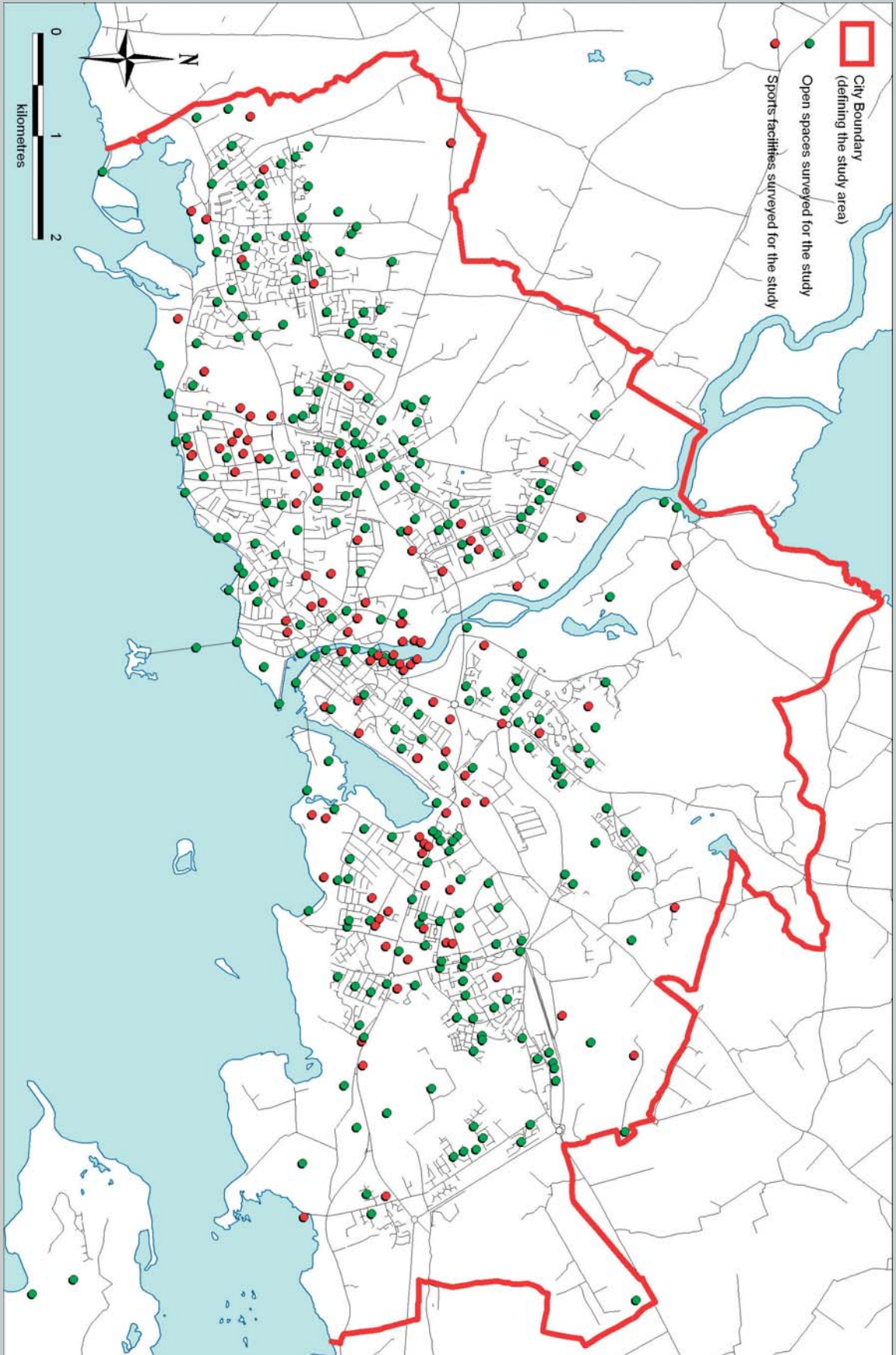
### 4.2 | Open Space Audit

Map 2 shows the location of open space and sports facilities surveyed. A corresponding list of facilities is available separately.

Galway's diverse range of open spaces caters for both passive and active recreation. The classification of open spaces and amenity areas outlined in Figure 1 is broadly consistent with the City Development Plan 2005 - 2011.

The audit of open spaces has identified hierarchy types and names of open space within the city. Within the classification, playing pitches are considered as formal sports facilities and not open space. Cemeteries have also been added to the classification. While many open spaces listed in the categories below are on publicly owned lands, privately owned open spaces are also a significant component of open space within the city, including institutional and agricultural lands.





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Galway City Council 2008 Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe

**Map 2. Open Space and Sports Facilities Survey Locations**

Figure 1. Open Space Hierarchy

Category	Classification <i>*(See explanation note at end)</i>	Facilities
<p><b>City Parks</b></p> 	<p>Large scale open spaces for passive and active recreation, wildlife conservation and education. (Over 10 hectares).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barna/Lough Rusheen Park (includes Cappagh Park)</li> <li>• Terryland Forest Park</li> <li>• Merlin Woods City Park</li> <li>• Rinvilla Park **</li> </ul>
<p><b>Neighbourhood Parks</b></p> 	<p>Mixed size parks formally designed and maintained for passive and active recreation. (Between 1-10 hectares)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cluain Mhuire Park</li> <li>• South Park</li> <li>• Mc Grath's Field</li> <li>• Renmore Park</li> <li>• Westside</li> <li>• Ballinfoile/Crestwood</li> <li>• Castlepark</li> <li>• Thomas Hynes Park</li> <li>• Mervue Public Park</li> <li>• Ballyloughaun</li> <li>• Corrib Park</li> <li>• Shantalla Community Park</li> </ul>
<p><b>City Centre/Local Parks</b></p> 	<p>Small scale parks designed for passive and active recreation, streetscape value and civic function in central city or suburban locations (Less than 1 hectare)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quincentennial Park</li> <li>• Millennium Park</li> <li>• Fr. Burke Park</li> <li>• Woodquay Park</li> <li>• Salthill Park</li> <li>• Claude Toft Park</li> <li>• Eyre Square</li> <li>• Sliding Rock Park</li> <li>• Red Lane Park</li> <li>• Water Lane Park</li> <li>• Grattan Park</li> <li>• Dun Na Mara Park</li> <li>• The Plots</li> </ul>
<p><b>Enclosed Marine/Wetland/Coastal Areas ***</b></p> 	<p>Naturally occurring environments used for passive and active recreation, bathing, shore fishing, wildlife conservation and education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nimmo's Pier</li> <li>• Ballyloughaun Beach</li> <li>• Ladies Beach</li> <li>• Blackrock Beach</li> <li>• Seapoint Beach</li> <li>• Grattan Beach</li> <li>• Silverstrand</li> <li>• Lough Atalia</li> <li>• Old Dock</li> <li>• Ballyknow Quay</li> <li>• Roscam Pier</li> <li>• Murrough Pier</li> </ul>

### River and waterways \*\*\*



Open spaces adjacent to river and canal system or means of access to river and canal system offering townscape value, water based sporting opportunities, passive recreation, fishing or wildlife conservation.

- River Corrib and City Canal system including Menlough Pier
- Menlough Castle Pier
- Eglinton Pier
- NUIG jetties

*Refer also to facilities listed under Greenway/Walkway category*

### Greenway/ Walkway



These are established or potential amenity corridors facilitating non-motorised travel along linear routes, (including rights of way), often with wildlife. e.g. along coastal areas, through woodlands and parks, river or canal corridors.

- Eglinton Canal Walkway
- NUIG Riverside Walkway
- Bruach na Coiribe
- Salthill Promenade
- Mutton Island Walkway
- Railway Walkway
- Lough Atalia Walkway

### Civic Spaces



Urban spaces composed of soft or hard landscape treatment or a combination of both, offering venues for civic events or passive recreation.

- Fishmarket Square
- Eyre Square (Kennedy Park)
- Shop St/Quay St
- St Nicholas Civic Space
- Courthouse Square
- The Small Crane

### Residential Open Spaces



Open space within residential areas.

Occur throughout the city. In general all open space lands above 0.2 ha (1/2 acre) in residential areas are zoned RA - Recreation and Amenity

### Commercial and Industrial Open Spaces



Areas offering general amenity value often with landscape planting within the grounds of commercial or industrial developments. These areas can provide a setting for buildings and soften the visual impact of development.

Occur throughout the city, including IDA lands, St James' Health Centre.

### Institutional Open Space



These comprise of open space as part of use for educational, health, religious or residential institutional use, often with some access to the wider public.

Occur throughout the city, including:

- GMIT Grounds
- NUIG Grounds
- The Brothers of Charity Grounds
- St. Anne's Children's Centre Grounds
- Merlin Park Hospital Grounds
- Bon Secours Hospital Grounds
- Galway Clinic Grounds

### Cemeteries



Graveyard or burial ground, often located adjacent to a church or within a churchyard providing a green area within the heart of a community.

- Bushy Park
- Mount St Joseph's
- Ragoon
- St James
- Castlegar
- Terryland (Castlelawn)
- Forthill
- Bohermore
- Menlough

### Recreational and Amenity Zoned Lands



Areas zoned recreational and amenity, which do not fall into any of the above categories.

Located at fringes of city, including:

- Centre of Ballybrit Race Course
- Lands at Doughiska
- Lands at Clybaun
- Dangan Woods
- Lands at Kingston
- Lands at Ardaun
- Roscam RA zoned lands
- Roscam Woods

### Agriculture and High Amenity



Lands used for agricultural purposes, (often forming greenbelt), offering amenity, passive recreation opportunity and visual aspect

Located at fringes of city, including:

- Land at Menlough, including Castle and Woods
- Lands at Roscam

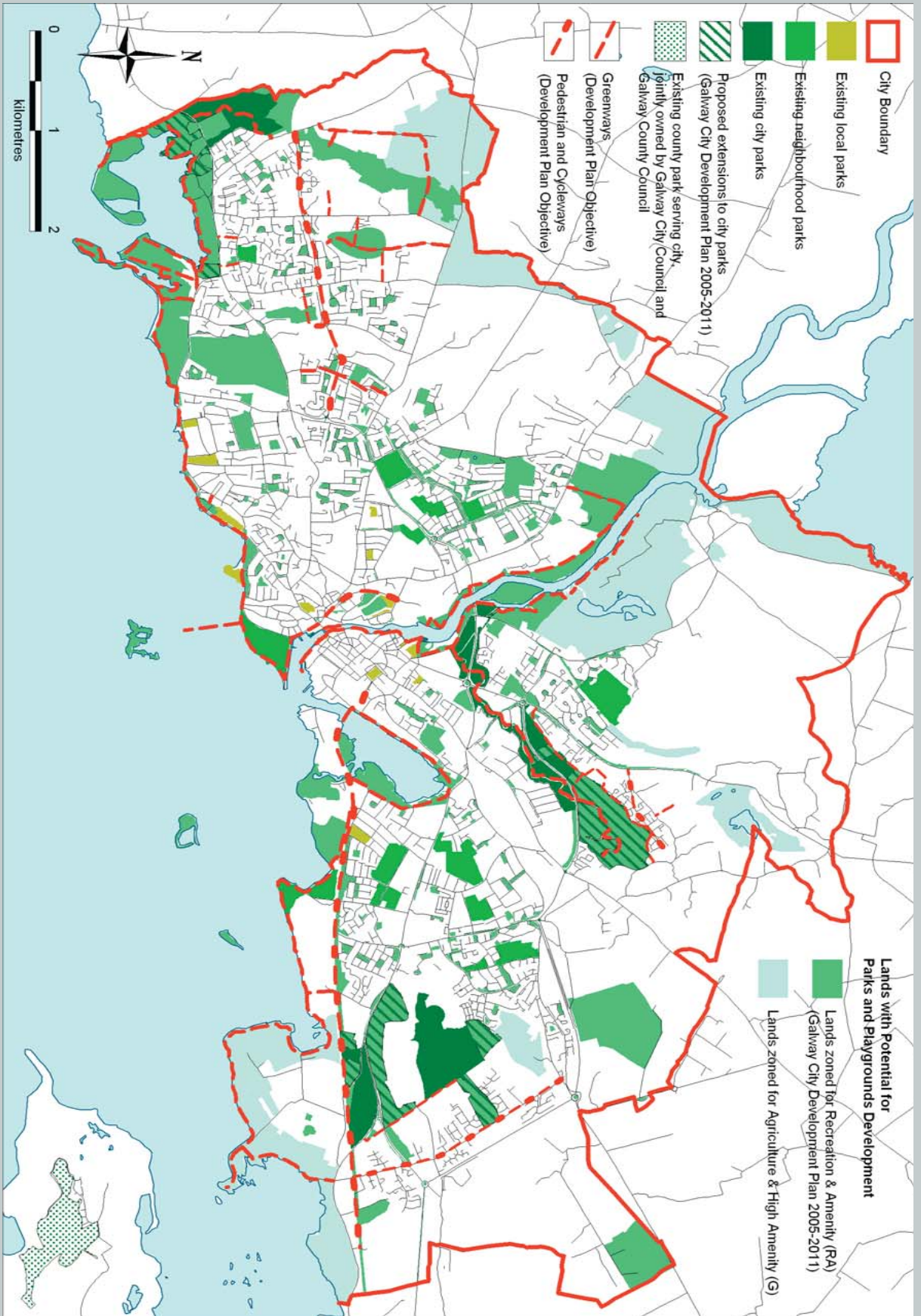
\*Classification considers National Playing Fields Association Guidelines, 2002 and Table 4.4 (Open Spaces within the Green Network) of City Development Plan 2005-2011.

\*\* Rinville Park is jointly owned by Galway City Council and Galway County Council and lies outside the city boundary.

\*\*\*These areas have been assessed under the water based amenities survey in Section 4.4.

The locations of parks, areas zoned Recreation and Amenity and Agriculture and High Amenity and potential linkages are shown in Map 3.





**Galway City Recreation and Amenity Needs Study**  
Galway City Council 2008 Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe

**Map 3. Existing Parks - Areas Zoned Recreation and Amenity (RA) and Agriculture and High Amenity (G) - and Greenways, Pedestrian and Cycleways**

### 4.3 Ecological Audit

Galway City, in contrast to other large cities in Ireland, contains many high-quality areas of semi-natural habitat and areas of high biodiversity value adjacent to residential areas and the city centre. The range of these habitats is also surprisingly high and includes “soft” sandy mudflat and saltmarsh, rocky shores and coastal cliffs, ancient oak woodland and calcareous woodlands, limestone pavement, grassland and a major river all within a few square kilometres.

Parts of the city area are designated as internationally important nature conservation areas in the form of candidate Special Areas of Conservation under the ‘Habitats Directive’ (Galway Bay Complex and Lough Corrib Complex) and Special Protection Areas (Inner Galway Bay) under the ‘Birds Directive’. There are also habitats of national and local importance within the city. The sites of international ecological importance; sites of national ecological importance (proposed and possible future Natural Heritage Areas (NHA)); and sites of local ecological importance are shown on Maps 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively. These sites are also listed in the City Development Plan 2005-2011 (pages 43, 45 and 46).

The City Development Plan 2005-2011 provides the framework for the establishment of a green network for the city, by protecting natural heritage areas and designating open space areas for recreational and amenity purposes. Within the city almost a fifth of the total land area is either designated as natural heritage areas or recreational/amenity open space. This Study has focussed upon recreation and amenity and how amenity areas in the city are used for active and passive recreation.

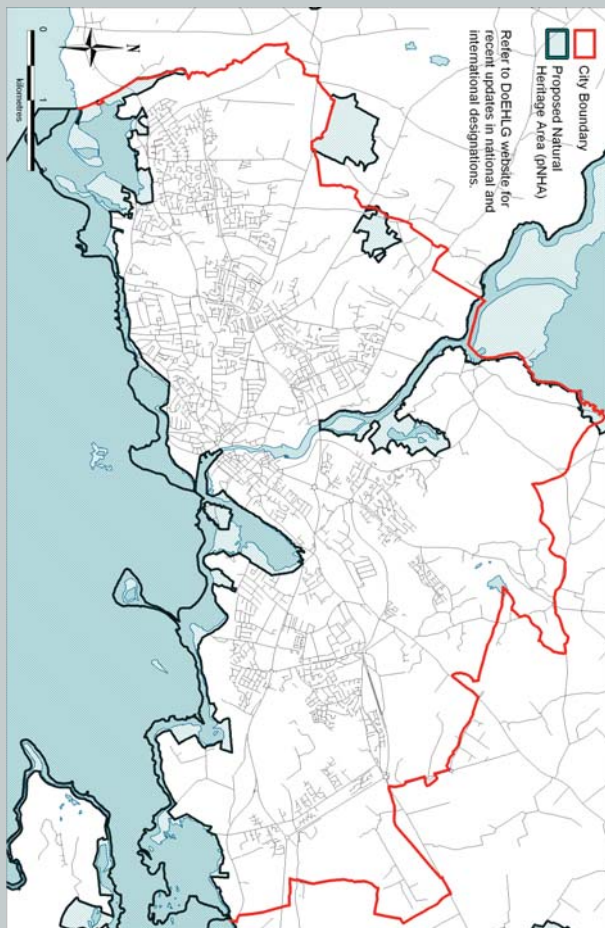
The City Habitats Inventory 2005 highlighted key threats to habitats and offered recommendations on the protection of these areas. Most of the threats that may be posed by recreation and amenity usage are covered by an umbrella description of ‘development’ but in fact the environmental effects of recreation and amenity are more subtle. These include:

- Direct disturbance of sensitive habitats - The trampling of woodland floor; erosion of soft coastline; and seeding of semi-natural grassland for amenity pitches.
- Indirect disturbance of sensitive species - Watersports, dogs, cyclists etc, disturbing breeding or roosting birds in woodland and coastal areas;
- Removal of natural processes -The removal of the grazing regime on the limestone pavement and grassland leads to invasion by scrub; river bank alterations can lead to an increase in natural scour and changes in flow elsewhere.
- Introduction of invasive species - The import of invasive and non-native species into areas of semi-natural habitat, e.g. self seeding of non-native species from adjacent lands and transfer of zebra mussels between rivers and lakes.

Recreation and amenity can help to bring about positive environmental impacts to an area of high biodiversity if carefully designed and managed. Areas at risk of decline or under threat can be restored and protected whilst allowing access for use by the community.

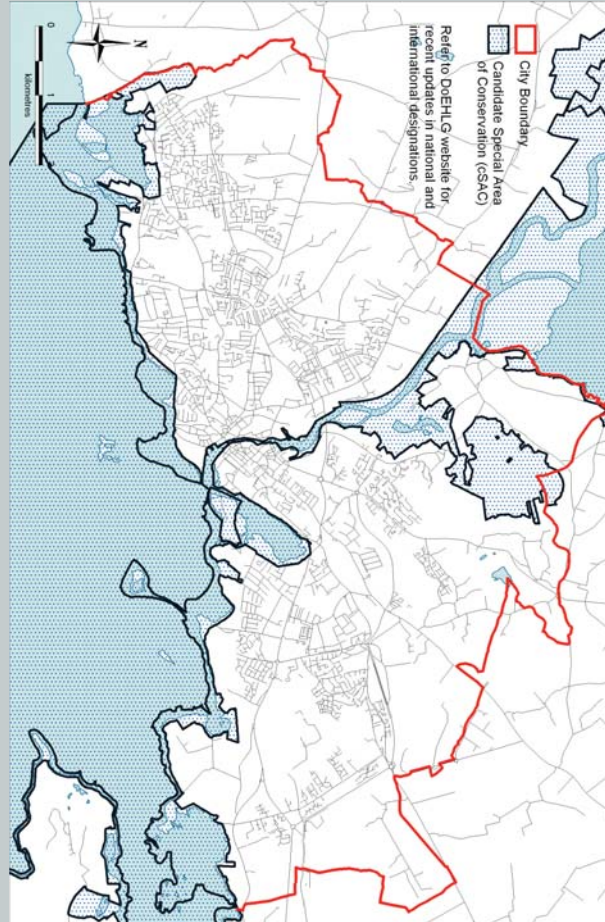
Sustainable recreation focuses on the interactions of the natural and human environment and minimises the impacts on ecosystems and on humans, while providing economic benefits to local residents on a sustained rather than seasonal or short-term basis. This Recreation and Amenity Needs Study therefore, places sustainable recreation at the heart of any proposals for development and management of available resources.





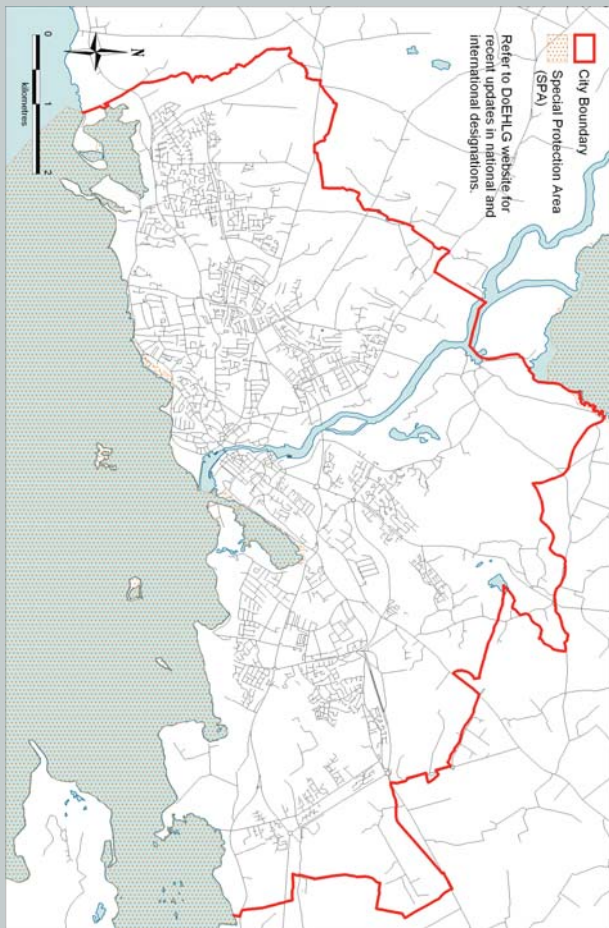
**Galway City Recreation and Amenity Needs Study**  
Galway City Council 2008 Comhairle Cathrach na Gaillimhe

**Map 4. Proposed Natural Heritage Areas**



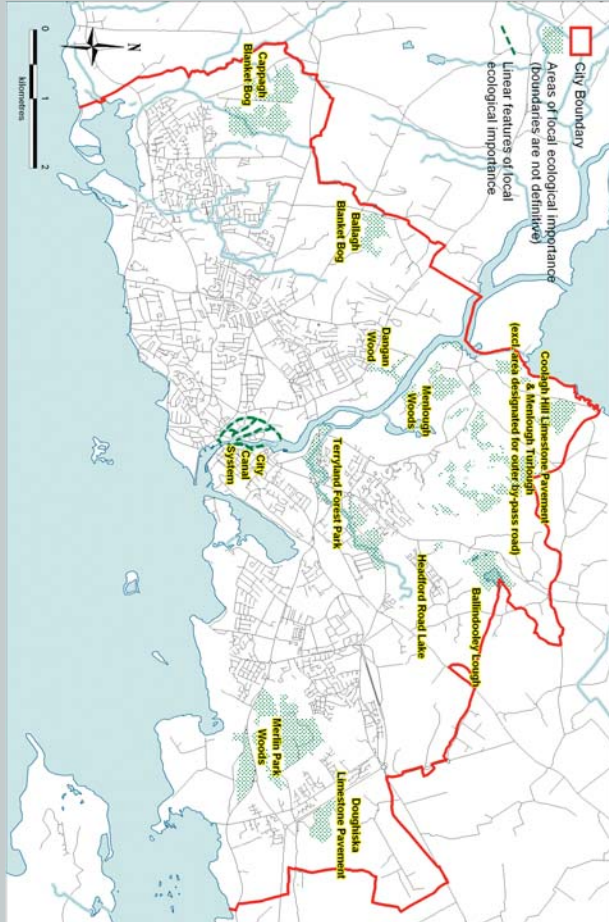
**Galway City Recreation and Amenity Needs Study**  
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**Map 5. Candidate Special Areas of Conservation**



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**Map 6. Special Protection Areas**



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**Map 7. Areas of Local Ecological Importance**

Maps 4-7 above show the city's pNHAs, cSACs, SPAs and Areas of Local Ecological Importance.





These maps are contained in **Appendix 5 - Maps** in A4 format.

In order to conduct an appropriate assessment of ecological issues with regard to management of open space and recreational areas, the Study looked at five key sites of semi-natural habitat that are used for recreation in Galway City. Each of the sites was visited to determine the following:

- Types of habitats present;
- Sensitivity of habitats;
- The nature of the recreational use (including access, visitor control);
- Indications of environmental impacts.

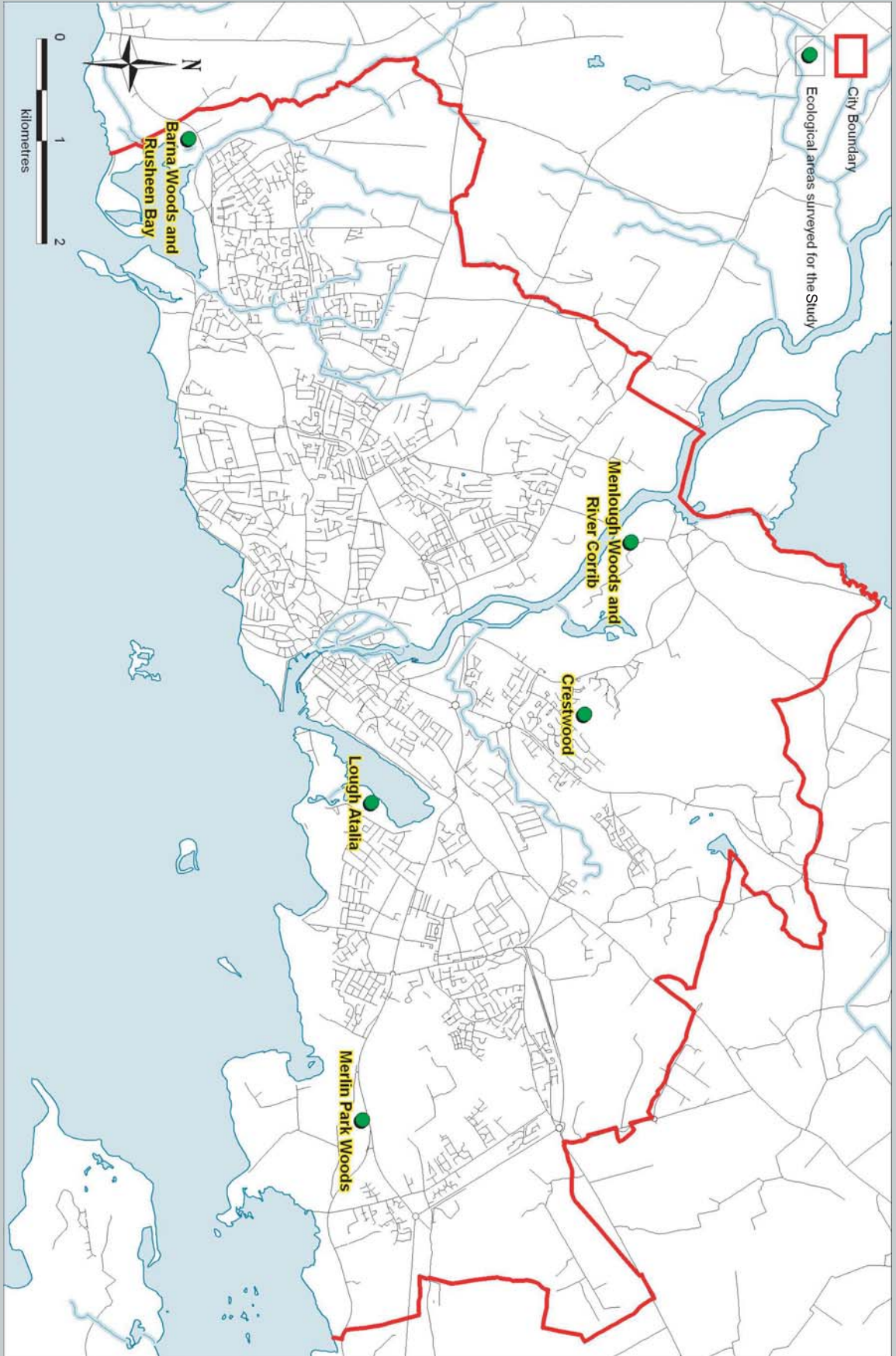
The five sites surveyed under the Ecological Audit are identified in Figure 2 and Map 8:

**Figure 2:** Five Sites surveyed under the Ecological Audit.

Examples	Ecological Designation	Site name
	Barna Woods part of the cSAC and Rusheen Bay designated cSAC, SPA, NHA and Wildfowl Sanctuary.	<b>Barna Woods and Rusheen Bay Area</b>
	Designated as SPA, cSAC and pNHA	<b>Lough Atalia</b>
	Area of Local Ecological Importance.	<b>Merlin Woods (Auntíní and Uncailí Woods, south of Dublin Road)</b>
	Area of Local Ecological Importance.	<b>Menlough Castle/ Corrib area</b>
	Undesignated *	<b>Crestwood</b>

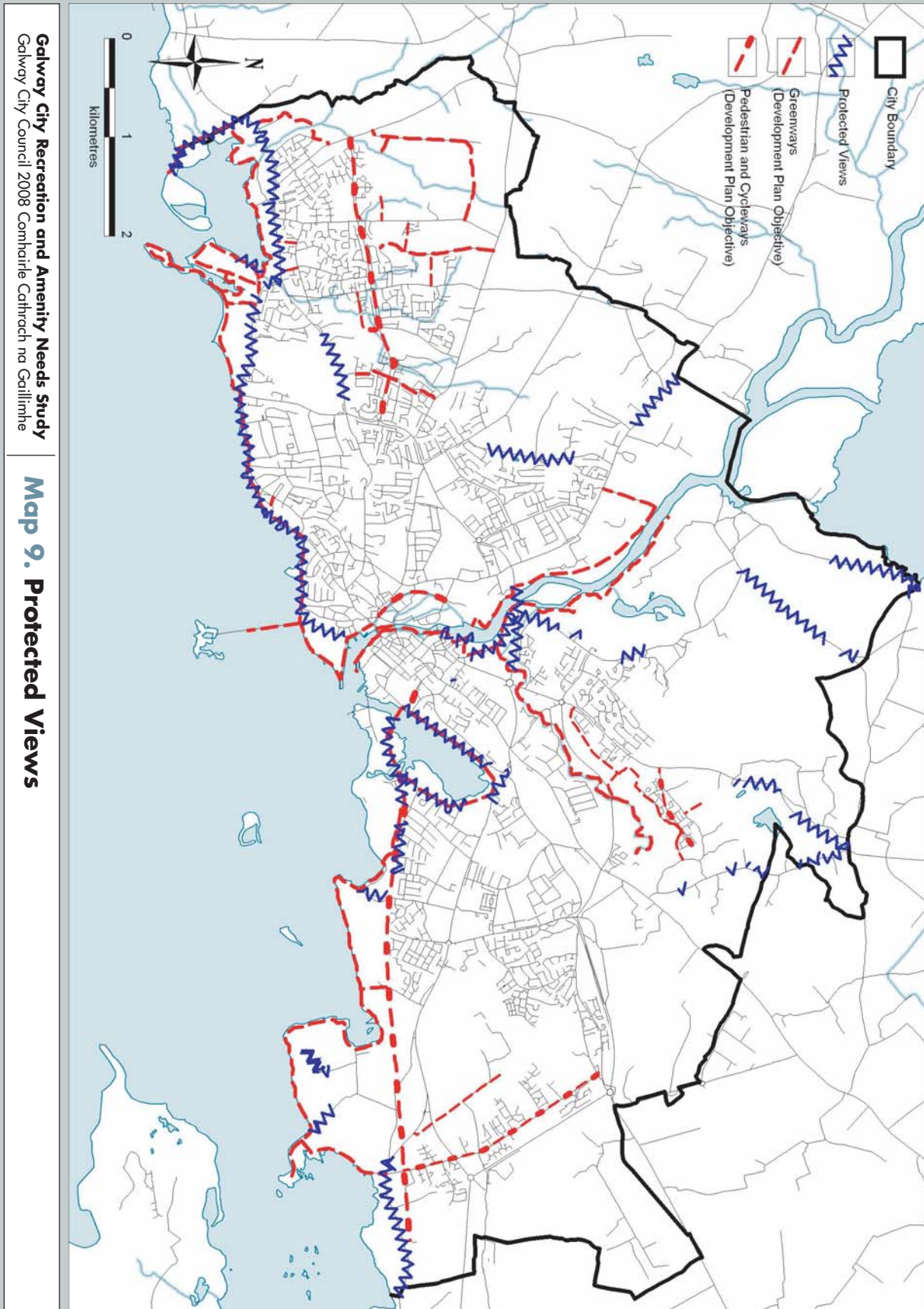
\* Part of site included however as an Annex 1 Habitat under the Habitats Directive





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**Map 8. Ecological Survey Locations**



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**Map 9. Protected Views**

The city's protected views, both panoramic and linear were also taken into consideration in the preparation of the Study. They are identified in Map 9 and listed in the City Development Plan (page 52).

## 4.4 Water Based Amenity Audit

Open spaces and amenity areas identified in Map 3 are complemented by a range of water based amenities where the public can walk and appreciate the city's fine setting and its ecologically protected areas. There is a diverse and significant recreational water resource available to the city. This includes a convergence of a range of recreational amenities including extensive coastline, river and canal system, waterways and Lough Corrib, many of which are in or very close to the city centre. The emerging provision of a linked network of walks and cycling routes enhances the value of these water based amenities.

The water based recreation facilities surveyed are shown in Map 10.

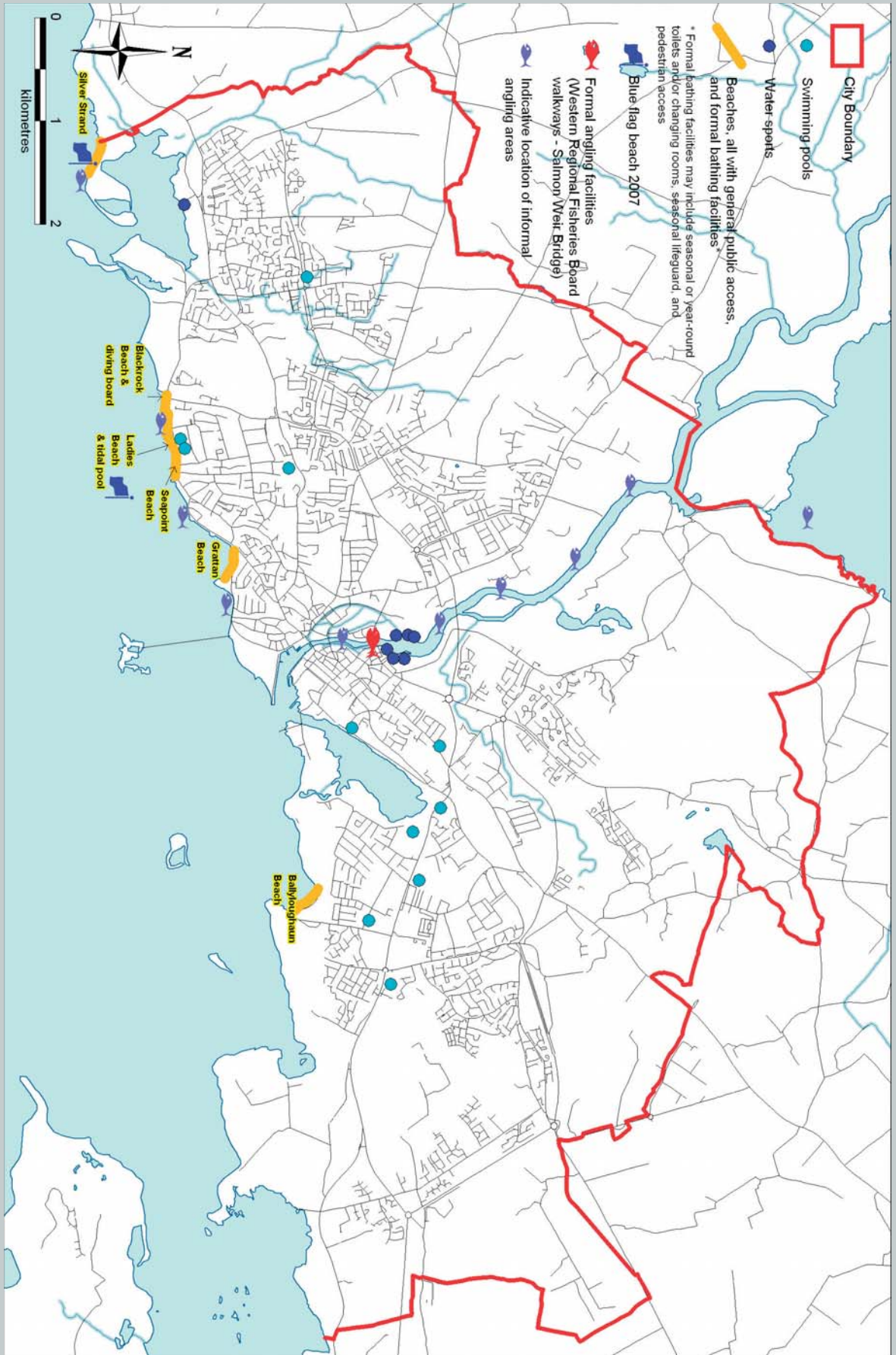
Map 10 also shows the location of the city's eleven indoor swimming pools and the tidal pool at Salthill. Beaches which provide formal facilities for recreational purposes have been identified at Silver Strand, Blackrock, Ladies Beach, Seapoint, Grattan Beach, and Ballyloughaun. Formal angling facilities also exist to the north and south of the Salmon Weir Bridge, while areas popular for informal fishing are also indicated. Six water sports club facilities, serving the needs of several clubs, are located in the city centre. A windsurfing club is located at Lough Rusheen.

There are a number of access points to the city's coastline for watercraft. Slipways are located at Blackrock, Ladies Beach, Seapoint and at Ballyloughaun. A number of currently operational leisure craft mooring facilities exist at Commercial Dock, Old Dock, Ballyknow Quay, Eglinton Pier and Nimmo's Pier. Mooring facilities not currently operational are located at Lough Atalia, Murrough and Roscam Quay, some of which have limited public access. Areas surveyed for water craft access are illustrated in Map 11.

Along the River Corrib further operational mooring facilities exist to the west of the city and belong to NUIG at Dangan and Newcastle. Menlough Pier is located to the north near the village of Menlough. There are former mooring facilities located on the eastern bank of the river at Menlough Castle which are not operational at present.

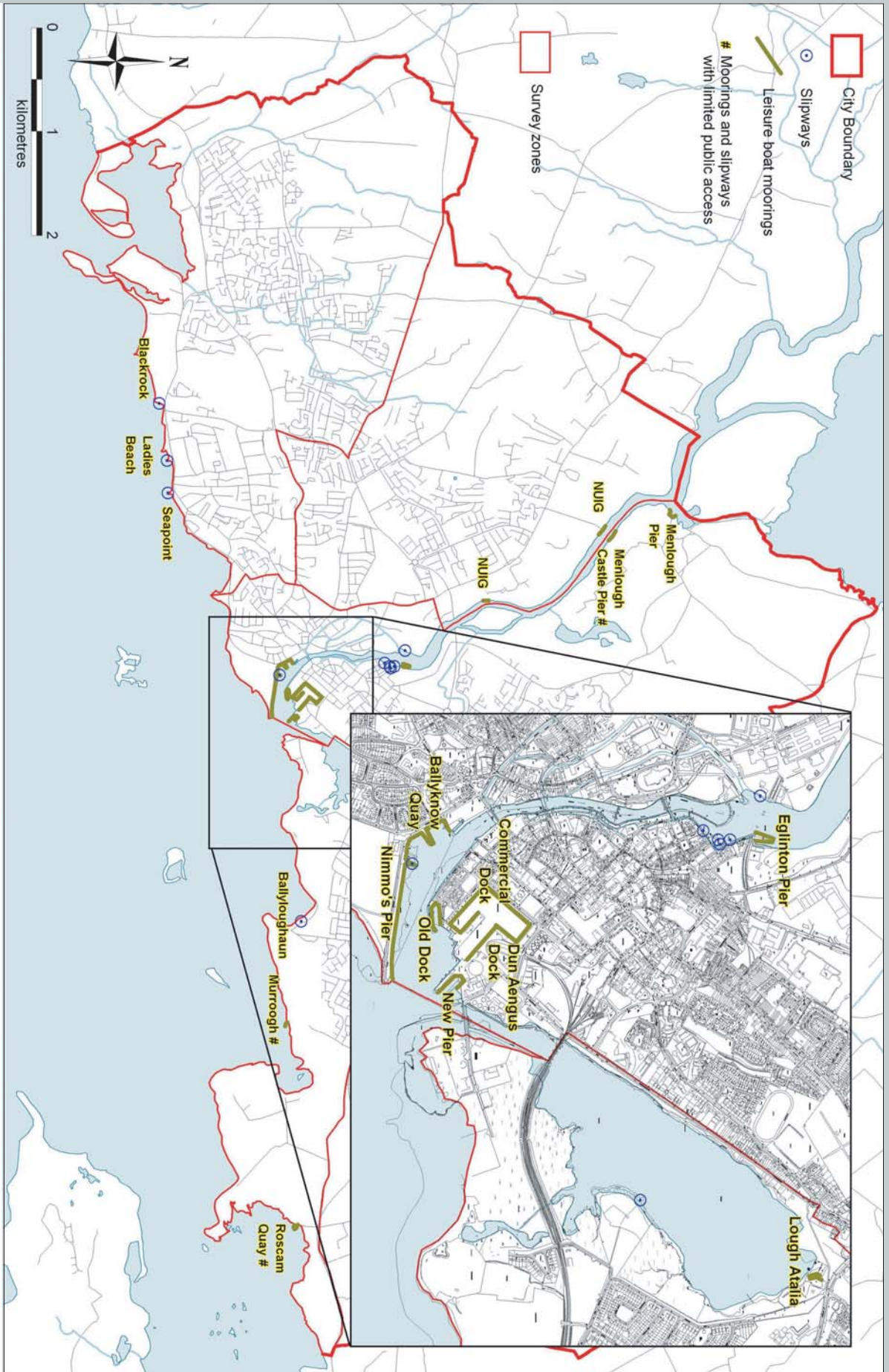
There are a number of other waterways in the city centre including the Eglinton Canal. The extensive range of water based amenities within the city is also complemented by a range of amenities and water sport clubs within the environs. For example, there are a number of water sports clubs located outside the city boundary, including the Galway Bay Sailing Club at Rinville. Lough Corrib also provides opportunities for water based recreation.





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**Map 10. Water-based Recreation Facilities**



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**Map 11. Slipways and Mooring Points**



## 4.5 Sports Audit

An extensive exercise in identifying sports facilities within the city has been undertaken. Regard has also been had to facilities located in the environs and which are used by residents, workers and visitors to the city. This exercise provides an important database for the city. The standard of facilities has also been assessed and this is dealt with in Chapter 6.

The total number of sports facilities is shown in Figure 3 below. Map 2 in section 4.2 shows the location of the sports facilities surveyed, whilst a corresponding list of facilities is available from the City Council.

Figure 3 Sports Facilities

Category	Sport	Number	Total
 <b>Pitches / Playing Fields</b> e.g. Renmore Park Liam Mellows GAA Club	GAA	26	90
	Soccer	28	
	Rugby	6	
	Volleyball	1	
	Informal Playing Fields / Training	29	
 <b>Sports Halls / Gyms</b> e.g. Kingfisher Club Westside Recreation Centre	Gyms	26	74
	Indoor/Shared Halls	24	
	Badminton	2	
	Squash	10	
	Handball/Racket ball	5	
	Community/Indoor Halls	7	
 <b>Swimming Pools</b> e.g. Leisureland	Swimming Pools	11	18
	Informal Bathing Areas	7	
 <b>Water Sports</b> e.g. Blackrock Diving Board / Rusheen Windsurfing School / Galway Rowing Club	Water Sports Facilities	7	7
 <b>Hard/All Weather Facilities</b> e.g. Mervue United	Tennis	24	53
	Basketball	23	
	Hockey/Soccer/All Weather Facilities	6	
 <b>Golf</b> e.g. Galway Golf Club	Golf	1	4
	Pitch and Putt	2	
	Driving Range	1	



**Running /  
Formal Jogging**  
e.g. Dangan Running Track

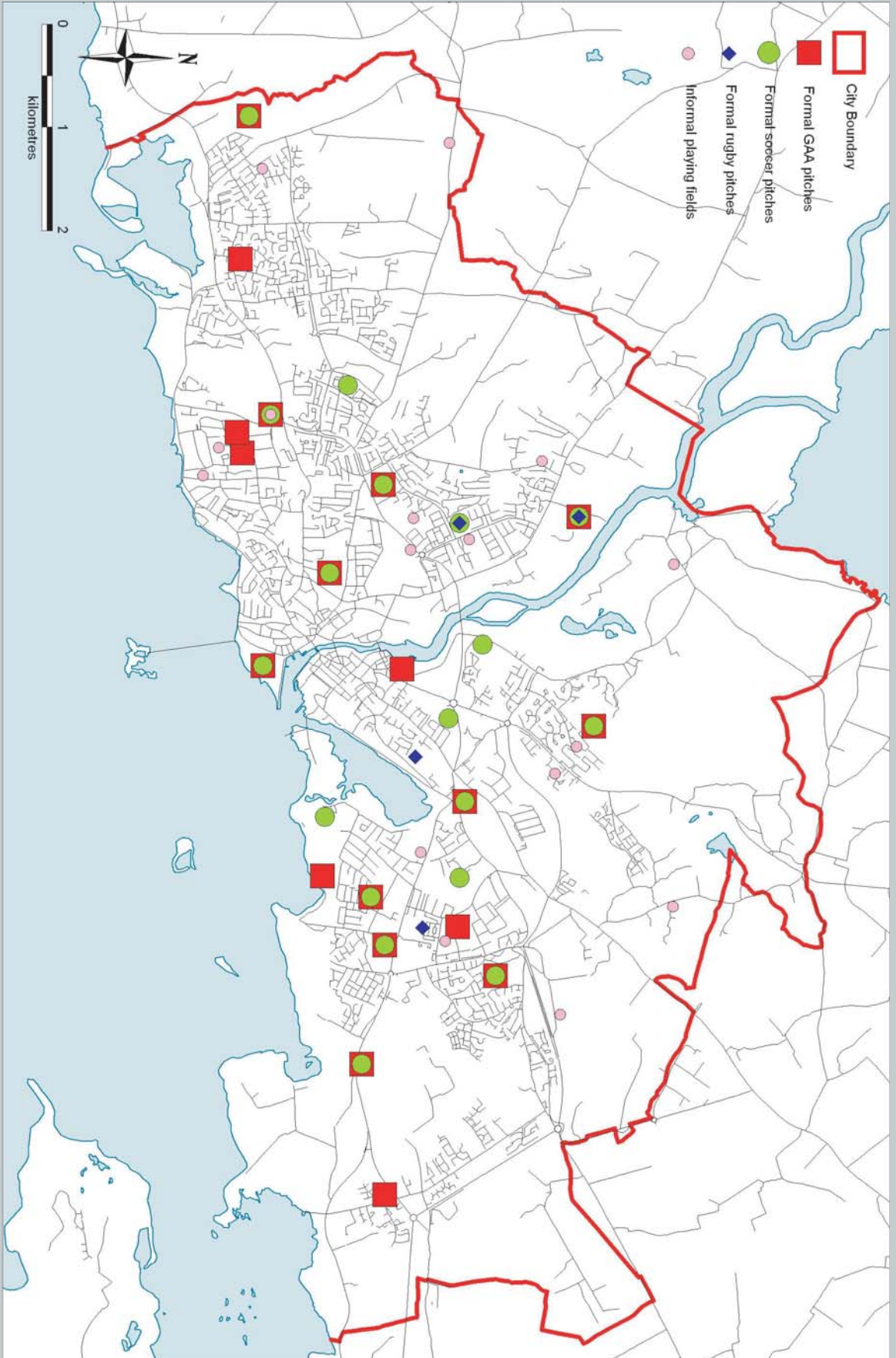
Running Tracks	2	2
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**Other**  
e.g. Ballybrit Race Course,  
Galway Greyhound Track

Racetracks	2	3
Riding School	1	

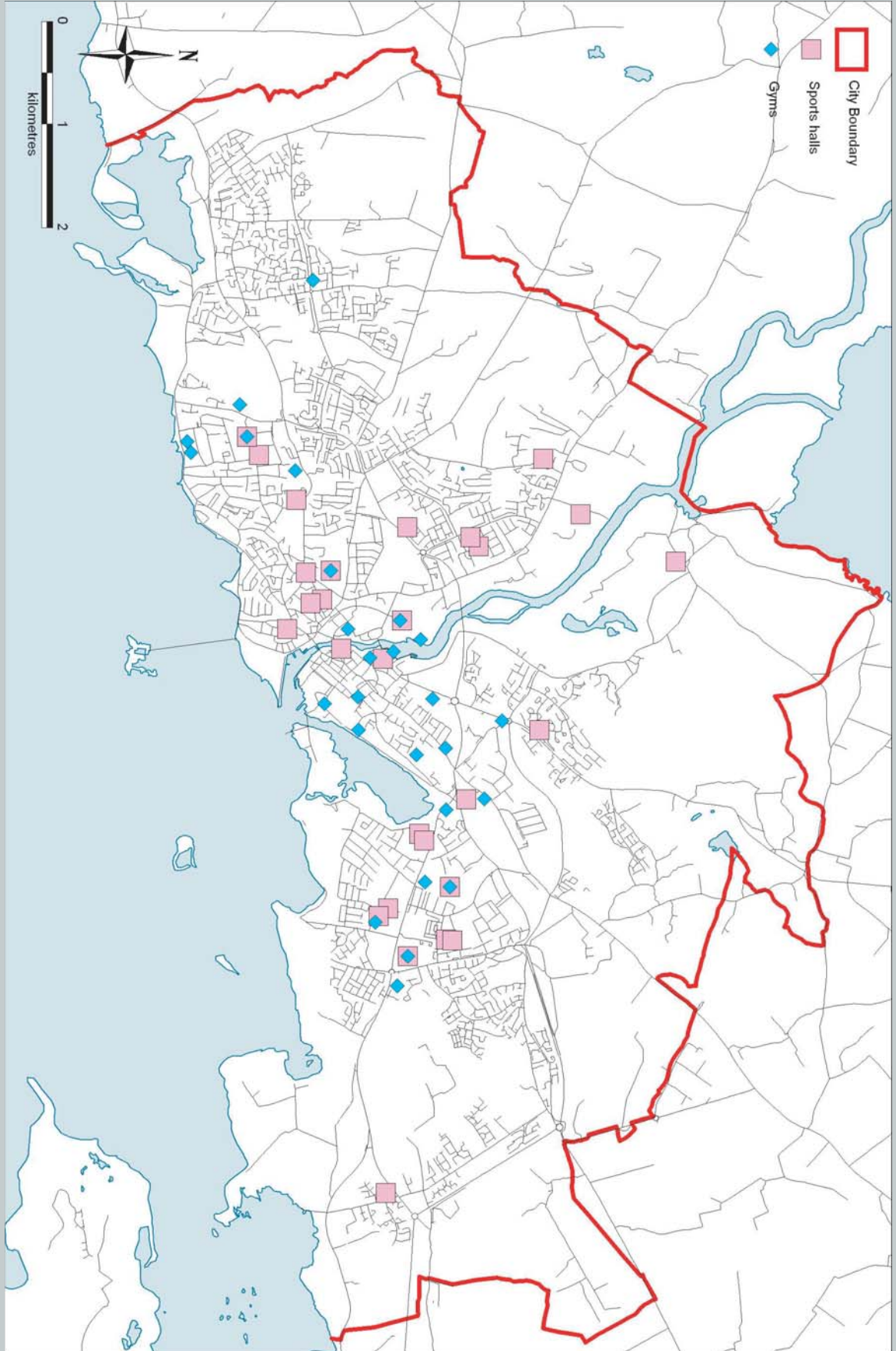
Map 12 shows the location of the pitch sports (GAA, soccer and rugby), while Map 13 shows the location of sports halls and gyms within the city.



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**Map 12. GAA, Soccer, Rugby and Informal Playing Pitches**





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**Map 13. Sports Halls and Gyms**

## 4.6 Open Space User Survey

User surveys were conducted at a variety of both open spaces and sports facilities at various locations throughout Galway City in August 2006. The key aim was to provide additional information about how facilities and amenities were used and to build up a profile of users. The facilities and amenities were mainly publicly owned but a number of private facilities were also surveyed for comparative purposes.

It should be noted that usage is dependent on a number of factors including time of survey and season. The surveys, while conveying useful information, are therefore representative of a point in time. The results are also reflective of only those amenities surveyed.

### Open Space User Survey

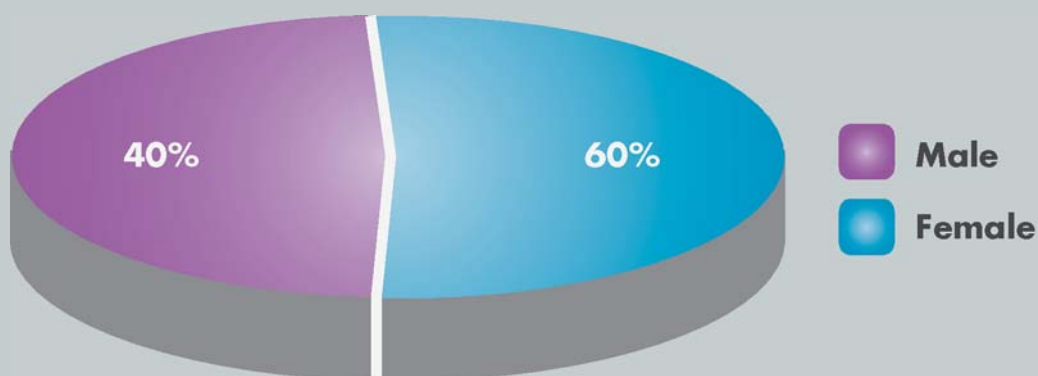
Nearly 150 questionnaires were conducted amongst users of 5 open space amenities: Ballyloughaun Beach, Barna /Lough Rusheen Park, Bruach na Coiribe (Corrib Riverside Walk), Salthill Promenade and Terryland Forest Park. These five amenities, which are representative of the city wide parks, include enclosed marine wetland / coastal amenities and greenways.

### Characteristics of those using open space and amenities

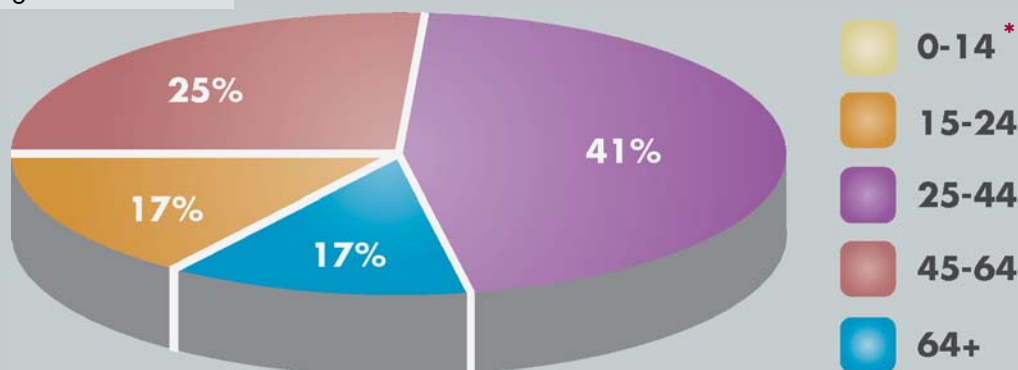
The principal characteristics of those using the selected open spaces are as set out in Figure 4 as follows.

**Figure 4:** Characteristics of those using open space

#### 1. Male and Female Usage

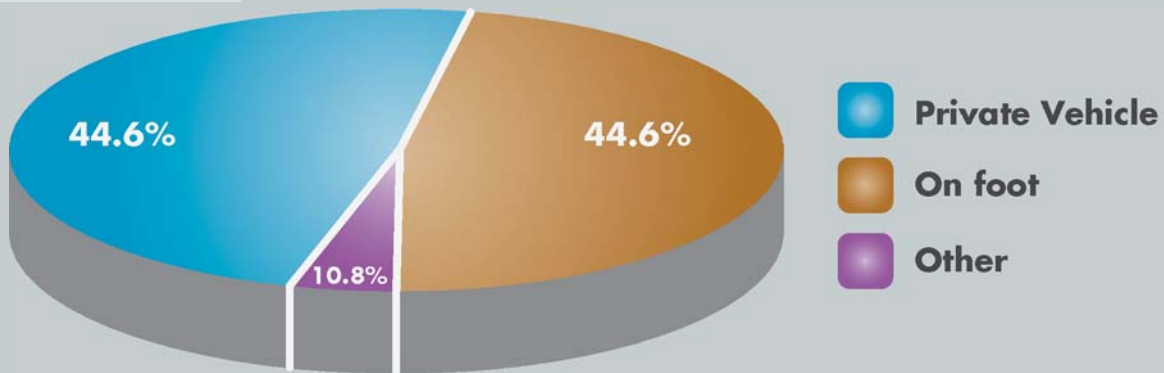


#### 2. Age Profile of Users

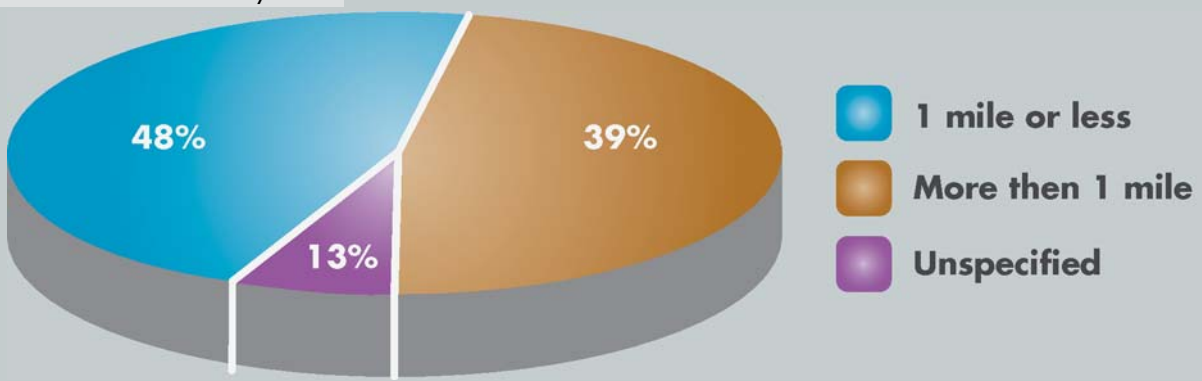


\* No members of this age group participated in the Open Space User Survey Questionnaire

## 3. Method of Travel



## 4. Distance Travelled by Users



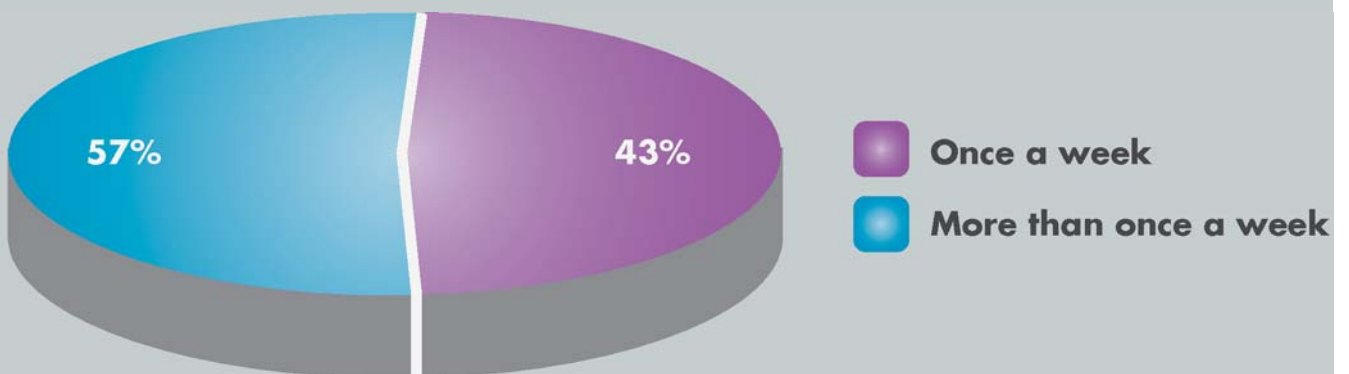
From the above, we can ascertain that female users were in the majority. Users were also mainly in the 25-44 age group. Walking was identified as a popular method of travel to open space amenities. The surveys indicated a need for sustainable modes of transport to open space amenities and the development of integrated transport modes.

### Usage of Open Space Facilities

The main characteristics of open space usage are set out below in Figure 5

**Figure 5:** Main characteristics of open space usage:

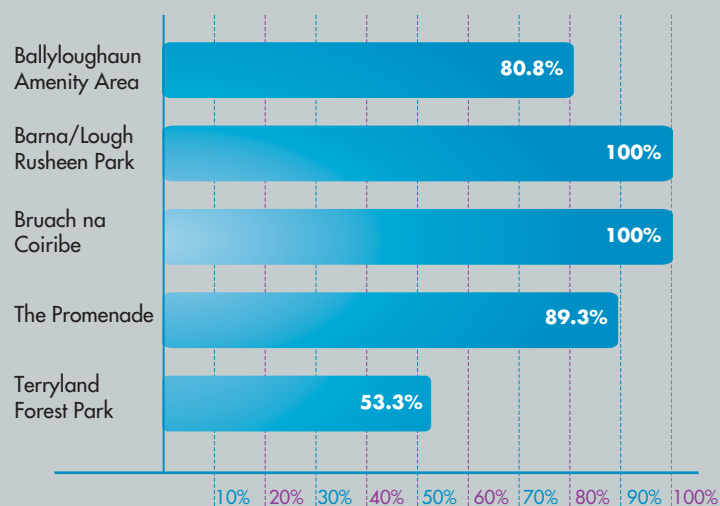
#### Frequency of Amenity/Facility Usage



In general, walks, woodland and coastal areas as well as facilities such as seating and paths were popular features with users. The principal reasons for use at Bruach na Coiribe and Salthill Promenade were for walking and relaxation and it is significant that these amenities are located in close proximity to the city centre. These amenities were used as part of work or shopping related trips. Relatively high frequency of use at Bruach na Coiribe and the Promenade reflected work related trips. Lunch time was a popular period of use for both. A significant number of visitors to the Promenade did so as part of a tourist related trip. Ballyloughaun Beach and Barna/Lough Rusheen Park were used less frequently due to their location within large residential hinterlands and the fact that they are generally less well located to large populations during the day. Terryland Forest Park was also used less frequently. It is worth noting however that usage at all locations varies in the evenings and at weekends. Seaside amenities were of interest to those using Salthill Promenade whereas those using Bruach na Coiribe cited historical interests. Barna/Lough Rusheen Park and Ballyloughaun were used for general recreational and enjoyment purposes. Terryland Forest Park was used by those with an ecological interest. Issues associated with this park included better access, signage and a suitably located play area. When considering responses relating to Terryland Forest Park it is worth bearing in mind that this is a relatively young park for which amenities are constantly being considered and planned.

The surveys indicated general satisfaction from the public and indicated that amenities are well regarded and enjoyed by residents and visitors to the city. This is clear from Figure 6 below.

**Figure 6:** Satisfaction levels for each open space/amenity surveyed:



## 4.7 Sports Facility User Survey

### Sports Facility Users Survey

Some 150 user surveys were conducted at 6 venues across the city to ascertain characteristics and opinions of those using sports facilities across the city. User surveys were conducted at Dangan, Leisureland, Mervue Sports Centre, Renmore Recreation Centre\*, Westside Sports Ground and Westside Recreation Centre\* as a representative sample of usage of both public and private sports facilities. A purpose of the survey was to ascertain opinion and customer satisfaction in the above facilities particularly Council owned / run facilities.

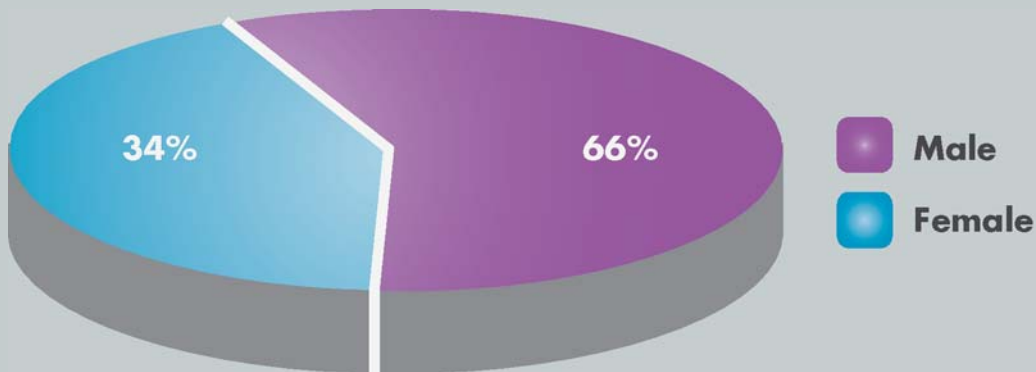
### Characteristics of those using sports facilities

Surveys indicated a higher proportion of male users than was the case for open space, however the user findings for open space were similar as was the method of travel to facilities. The majority of users were in the 25-44 age group, as was the case for open space.

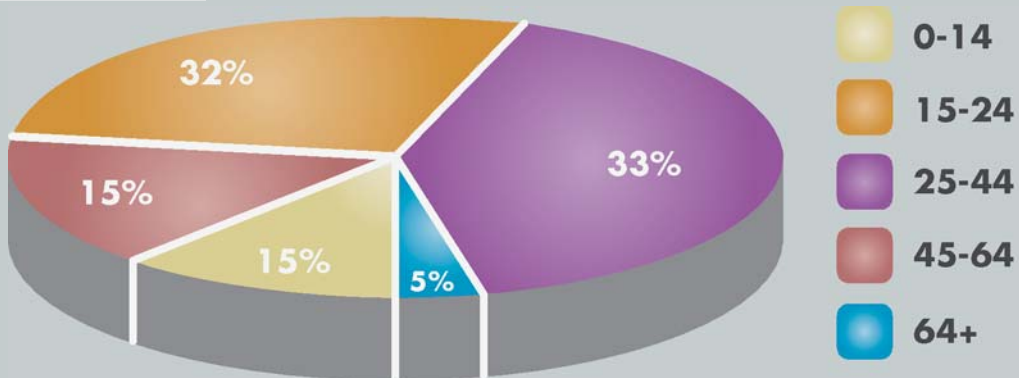
\*Also known as a Community Centre

Figure 7: Characteristics of those using sports facilities

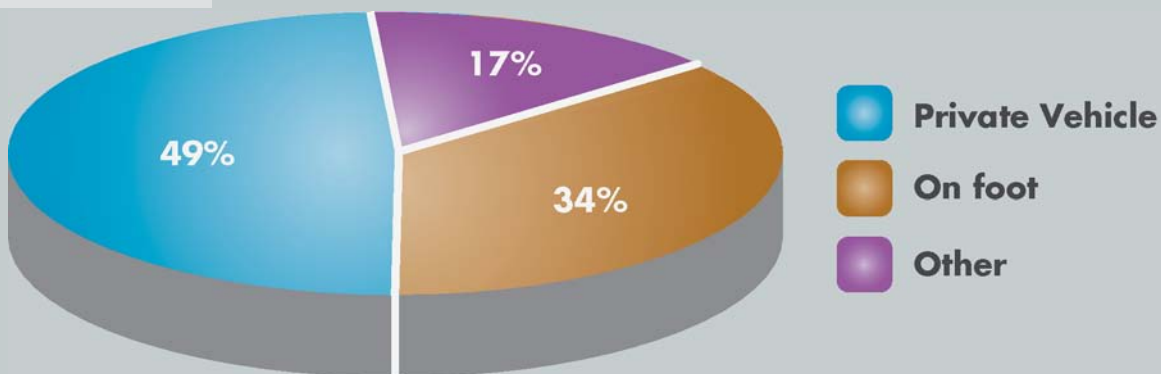
1. Male and Female Usage



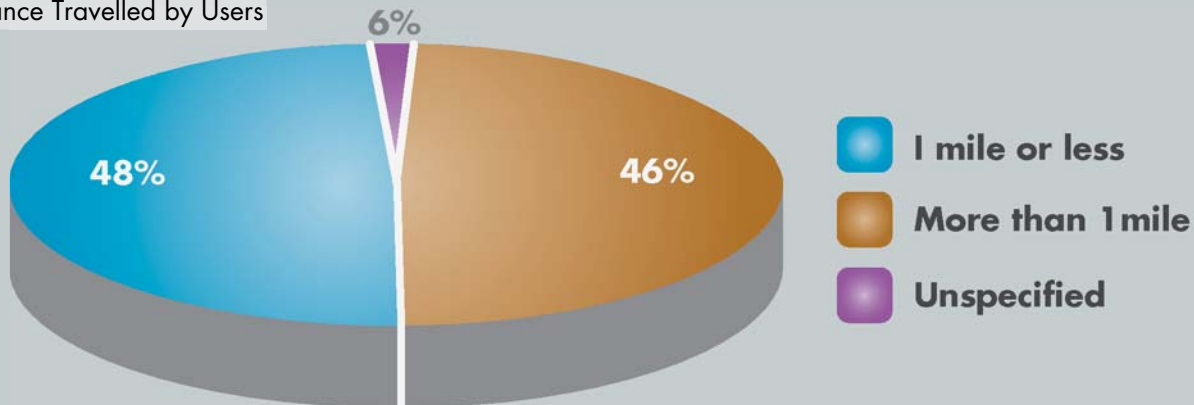
2. Age Profile of Users



3. Method of Travel



4. Distance Travelled by Users





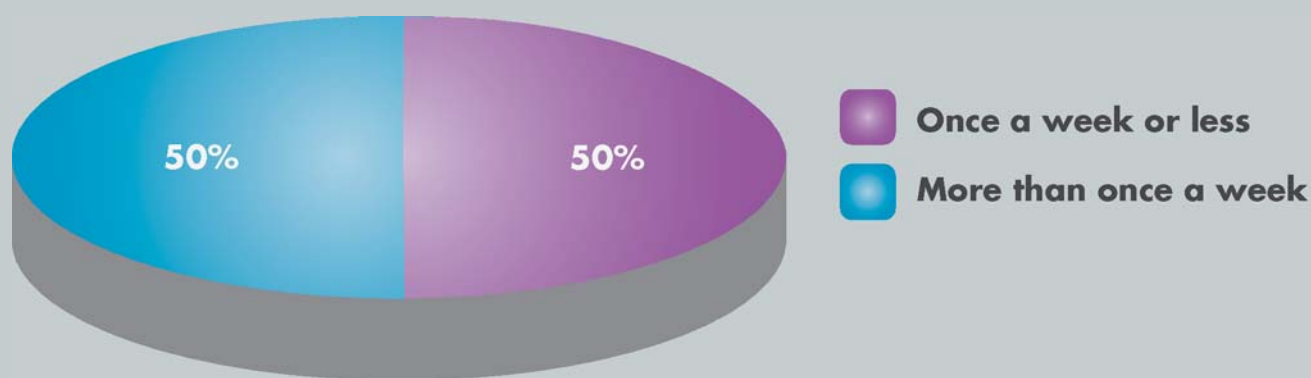
### Usage of Sports Facilities

Those using sports facilities did so as part of a single purpose trip and a relatively higher proportion travelled longer distances to sports facilities than to open spaces.

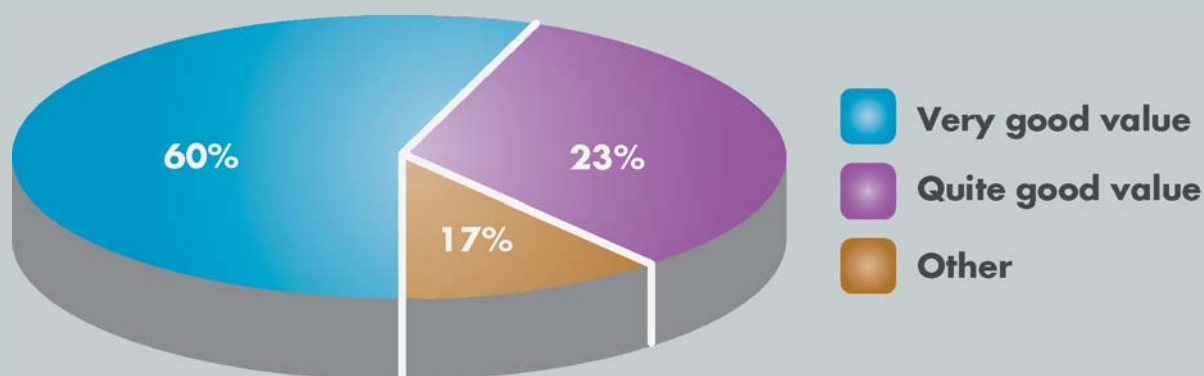
Frequency of use of sports facilities was similar to open space usage. Generally all facilities surveyed were considered good value for money. The stated main reason for using facilities was that they were close to home. There were no obvious links between use of sports facility and place of work as identified in the open space survey. The ability to hire or use equipment was not an obvious reason to enhance usage / patronage. The key results on usage are shown in Figure 8 below.

**Figure 8: Main characteristics of sports facility usage**

#### Frequency of Sports Facility Usage



#### Were the Facilities Good Value?



Most of the sports facilities users surveyed relied mainly on car as the means of transport. A high number of users at Leisureland, Mervue Sports Centre and Westside Recreation Centres accessed these facilities by car and have low levels of people walking to use these facilities.

There were several key results with regard to specific sports facilities. Renmore Recreation Centre had a high level of usage and nearly all users were defined as local residents. Some 79% of respondents at Renmore Recreation Centre stated that they had no access to a car. Low car ownership was also an issue at Westside Recreation Centre. However, a high level of usage amongst the 0-14 age group was recorded at this location. In Renmore, almost a quarter of users were in the 0-14 age group whilst in Westside over a third of users were in this category. In both Renmore and Westside, approximately 80% of users were aged 44 or less.

Leisureland had an exceptionally high level of female usage (72%). This may be attributable to the quality, management and level of security provided at this facility. Leisureland is particularly attractive to families



and had a high level of usage amongst those of child rearing age. Westside Recreation Centre also received a high degree of usage by local people. Survey results for Leisureland indicated a high degree of satisfaction with facilities and amenities and this may be a reason why users are prepared to come from further distances to this facility.

Generally there was a high degree of satisfaction amongst users of sports facilities.

## 4.8 Household Survey

A survey of 500 households (or approximately one in every 40 households estimated in the city) was conducted in September 2006. The purpose of the household survey was to establish attitudes and expectations in regard to recreation provision; identify key issues; establish current and future recreational needs; and finally, to consider the range of activities, including alternatives, for those currently or intending to participate in the future. In particular the objective was to identify barriers related to facility and amenity usage that contribute to non participation which could become the focus of policies, objectives or proposals later in the Study.

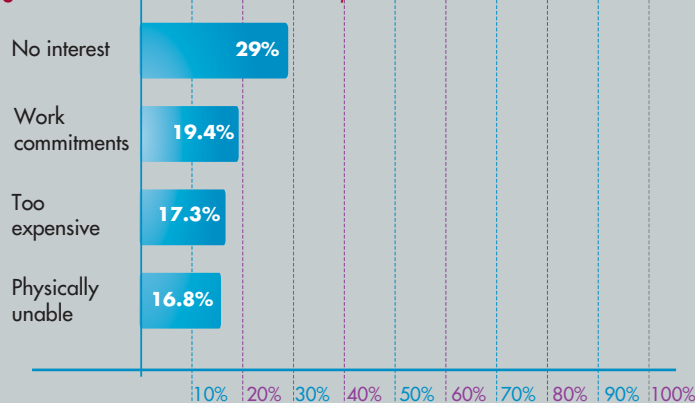
### Participation

Survey results indicated that there is generally little differentiation between male and female participation in recreation and sport.

The most popular activities are of an informal nature with walking the most popular in all age groups but particularly in the 45 – 64 age group. In the 20 – 34 age group, soccer and gym exercise were identified as popular. GAA and soccer were significantly popular in certain areas of the city. Hockey and skateboarding did not figure prominently as activities participated in but it is noted however that these activities are age specific.

Walking, swimming, and cycling, in that order, were the most popular activities undertaken as a household. Informal recreational activities were generally participated in more frequently than sport.

**Figure 9: Main Reasons for Non-Participation in Passive/Active Recreation**



As can be seen from Figure 9, principal reasons for non-participation in active or passive recreation were firstly lack of interest (nearly one third of all households) followed by work commitments (approximately a fifth). Expense and being physically unable to participate in activities were also significant factors for non-participation. It is possible that this may be partially attributed to fitness levels of the population.

Reasons for non-participation specifically relating to facilities, access to these and awareness of facilities were relatively insignificant. Facilities being too expensive (17%) and a lack of facilities being locally available (10%) comprised nearly a quarter of all reasons for non-participation. However, this contrasts with

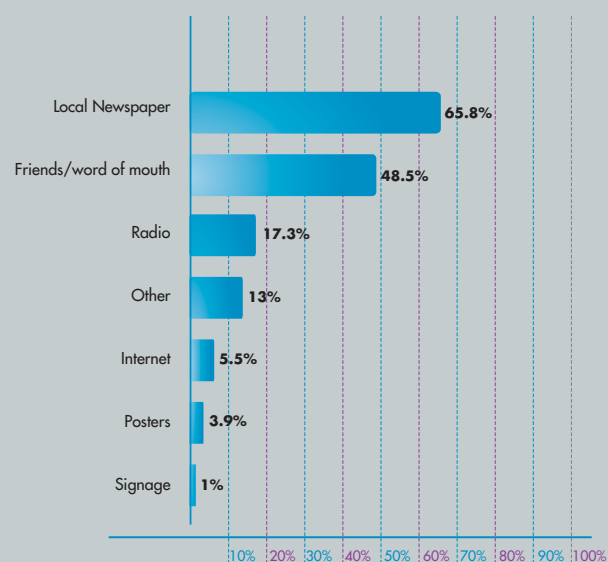
national figures which indicate that expense of facilities, lack of local facilities and clubs comprises only approximately 3% of reasons given for non participation (ESRI 2004). With regard to expense, this response may be considered to apply solely to those recreational facilities for which fees are levied such as gyms and private clubs. In Galway there is also comparatively little gender differentiation for non participation unlike the results of broadly similar national surveys.

### Awareness / Availability of Information

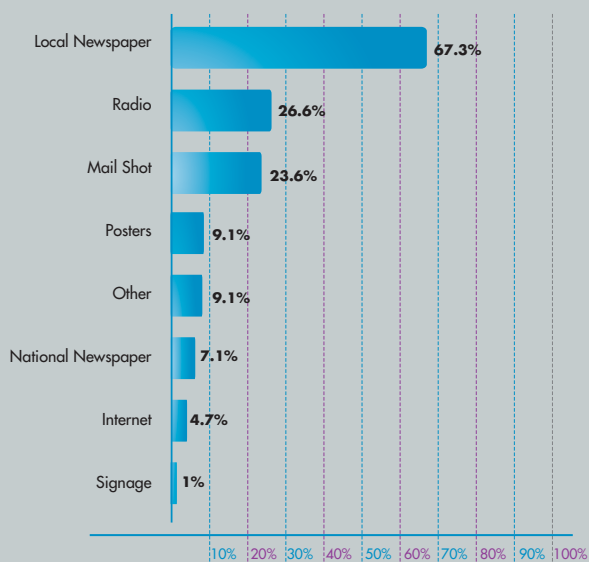
From Figure 10 below it would appear that the most effective means of making the population aware of amenities and facilities is by "word of mouth" and by local newspapers. Awareness of Council owned / run facilities could be most effectively enhanced by use of local newspapers, followed by radio and then mail-shot. The Internet did not feature prominently as a means of advertising facilities and amenities. It is noteworthy, however, that the City Council is currently developing their website to promote the existence and availability of facilities. The internet is likely to be used particularly by visitors to the city.

**Figure 10: Findings on Information and Awareness**

**Methods of Receiving Information on Passive/Active Recreational Facilities**



**Most Effective Methods of Improving Awareness of Passive/Active Recreational Facilities**

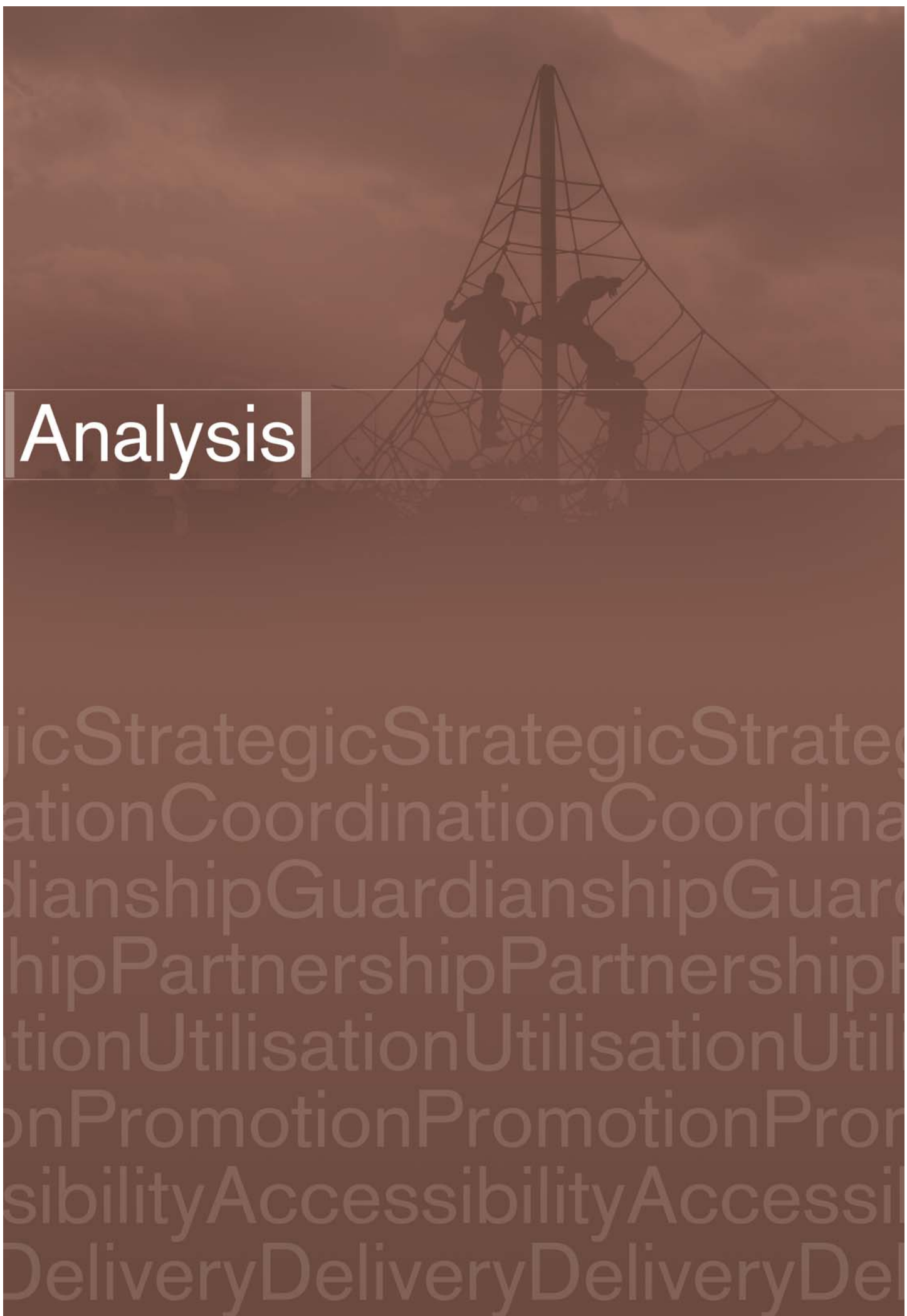


### Future Participation

Surveys indicated that future likely activities to be participated in included swimming, availing of open space and parks, walking, cycling and using the gym. Soccer, hurling and Gaelic football also figured prominently.

Future use of existing parks and playgrounds would be enhanced by improving amenities, increasing awareness and by organising public events. As public use of parks requires no fee, there is potential for parks to be further used for recreational purposes and the key issue in this context is likely to be management and promotion.

Surveys also indicated that swimming could be enhanced by providing child minding facilities and by generally improving access. Cycling and walking could be increased further by improving awareness of and generally improving cycleways and pedestrian routes. The most popular means of encouraging future participation relating to sports facilities were reduced fees, instituting "pay as you go", improving existing facilities and finally organising public events.



# Analysis

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## 5.0 | Policy Review

### 5.1 | Policy Review

There is a limited amount of literature and policy already in place at national level in particular on open space, recreation and sport. National advice on natural heritage and ecological conservation is developing.

#### National Policy

The *National Spatial Strategy 2002 - 2006* designated Galway City as a "Gateway". The Strategy seeks to provide balanced development which can be achieved by providing social infrastructure including sport and recreation facilities. The *National Development Plan 2007 – 2013* allocates funds to provide this infrastructure. Key national policies in the context of this Study include *A Policy for the Provision and Maintenance of Parks, Open Spaces and Outdoor and Recreation Areas (1987)* produced by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government which encourages the coordinated and hierarchical provision of parks, open space and outdoor recreation areas. This is to ensure that urban populations can participate in a wide range of active and passive recreational pursuits within easy reach of homes and places of work. *Targeting Sporting Change in Ireland: Sport in Ireland 1997 to 2006 and Beyond (Dept. of Education (1997))* identifies the requirement for all local authorities to prepare sports and recreational strategies to consider the provision, management and perceived lack of access to sports facilities.

At national level there are other important policy documents including *Ready Steady Play* which provides guidance on children's play areas. *The National Biodiversity Plan* seeks to enhance biodiversity preservation through the implementation of local biodiversity plans and programmes.

National policy is supplemented at regional level by the *Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region* which aims to develop Galway City as the "region's capital" and develop sport and leisure activities in the region so that all people can participate in and have access to these pursuits at affordable rates.

#### Local Policy

There is an extensive range of local policy documents listed in the appendices that inform this Study. Four key documents are as follows:

- **Galway City Development Plan 2005 – 2011.**
- **Galway City Parks and Amenities Strategy 2002 – 2006.**
- **Galway City Development Board Strategy "Beo agus Bríomhar" 2002 – 2012.**
- **Galway City Habitats Inventory 2005**

#### Galway City Development Plan 2005 – 2011

Galway City Development Plan is the statutory development plan for the city. A key requirement of the plan is to balance the protection of the city's natural heritage with the provision of recreational opportunities. Such a joint policy approach has been evolving and the plan identifies the genesis of a green network approach and advocates through this Study a co-ordinated strategic framework for the Council's future planning and management of recreational facilities and activities within the city. It also seeks to encourage good design and enhanced provision of facilities as part of the statutory planning process and in the context of the development management process.



### **Policies**

An extensive range of policies (Policies 4.1 to 4.9 inclusive) are contained in the City Development Plan covering such issues as the green city network, greenways and public rights of way, natural heritage, coastal areas and waterways, parks, urban woodlands and trees, the city as a “Child Friendly City” and the protection of views of special amenity value and interest.

### **Objectives**

The City Development Plan contains short term and long term objectives. Many of these objectives have been implemented or initiated. These include: the completion of the Eyre Square Enhancement Project; the initiation of the Coastal Walk from Blackrock to Silverstrand including coastal protection works; the provision of a park at Lough Atalia; acquisition of land for the expansion of Terryland Forest Park; development of equipped children’s play areas; acquisition of RA zoned lands; the development and upgrading of Toft Park; provision of a swimming pool on Cappagh Road; improvement of facilities and amenities at Ballyloughaun Beach and links to the area designated as a Local Area Plan at Murroogh; and the development and upgrading of existing boreens in Ragoon and Knocknacarra.

### **Zoning**

Extensive areas of land, which have the potential to become part of a network of open space, are shown in the City Development Plan. A range of zonings, including the Recreational and Amenity (RA) zoning objective, protect existing open spaces and recreational facilities and facilitate future provision.

### **Development Standards**

General open space development standards are applied in the city according to the nature of the proposed use and the location of development. In general, communal recreation and amenity space in residential areas is required to be provided at a rate of 15% of the gross site area. Open Space is also sought in commercial and industrial zoned land. The plan also contains standards to enhance qualitative aspects of open space and, where appropriate, encourage linkages between adjoining developments. Section 11.3.1 (c) of the plan states that, for all residential developments of more than ten units, a recreational facility shall be provided as part of communal open space. This should reflect the likely profile of future residents and the scale and type of development.

### **Summary**

The protection and enhancement of existing recreation and sports provision is a significant element of the City Plan. An extensive list of policies and objectives are contained in the plan and in this regard it is innovative and comprehensive. However, the strategic potential of existing zoned preserved open space can only be fully realised with improved linkage and accessibility. Local benefit can be enhanced with further improvement in resourcing to deliver high quality, well equipped open space. The City Plan’s zoning objective for recreational and amenity uses, and its requirement for 15% of residential zoned open space to be devoted to communal recreation and amenity space, will provide adequate amounts of land for such uses.

### **Galway City Council Parks & Amenities Strategy 2002 - 2006**

The ‘corporate objective’ of this strategy is to ensure that the city’s recreation and amenity facilities make the maximum contribution to the quality of life for all Galway’s citizens. This strategy highlights the need for parks and open spaces, outlines facility provision, prioritises strategic objectives alongside timescales and sets out a number of requirements for their delivery.

Significant steps have been made towards fulfilling the strategic objectives set out in the strategy. The implementation of many of those remaining objectives will be greatly assisted by this Study.

The main objective of the strategy is to provide a hierarchy of parks. Open space and amenity areas throughout the city have been significantly progressed through the development of several new facilities across the city such as: Barna/Lough Rusheen Park, Millennium Park and Ballyloughaun Amenity Area amongst others. A number of existing facilities have also been upgraded. The City has also made significant progress towards the provision of playgrounds.

The optimisation and management of coastal areas and waterways is being accomplished through developments such as the completed Bruach na Coiribe walkway, and amenity works at Lough Atalia and Ballyloughaun beach. Other major works such as the Silverstrand Coastal Protection Scheme are currently in the planning process.

The preservation, development and management of trees and woodlands throughout the city has been undertaken through a number of tree planting initiatives, the most significant of which is Terryland Forest Park.

Citizens of Galway have been encouraged through a number of community planting initiatives to engage in partnerships with Galway City Council as set out in the strategic objective of the strategy. For example, in March 2003 over 2,500 people planted over 7,000 trees at Terryland Forest Park.

Active recreation and play has also been promoted as a strategic objective, building on the policy set out in the November 2000 policy document *Galway as a Child Friendly City*. Acquisition of land and development of new facilities is ongoing and has resulted in the upgrade of nine existing facilities and the development of a further ten new playgrounds since the publication of that document. It should be noted that a new parks and amenity strategy is currently being prepared.

### **Galway City Development Board Strategy “Beo agus Briomhar” 2002 – 2012**

Beo agus Briomhar has been prepared by the City Development Board and is a non-statutory document which has fed into the City Development Plan. It provides the basis for a corporate plan for the city which prioritises actions for various departments of the City Council. It proposes a number of policies and objectives covering cultural, educational, social, and economic issues which relate to sport and recreation. Key objectives for this Study to address include: making the city more pedestrian, cyclist and child friendly; further development of social cohesion by the timely delivery of an appropriate quantity and quality of facility; protect, enhance and revitalise the city’s waterways and canals; preserve and enhance but fully utilise the city’s network of amenity areas; develop waterways as a tourism asset; develop a parks and recreation strategy; and finally develop an environmental programme promoting awareness of the local environment and heritage.

Different fora are identified for achieving these objectives and for implementing the Strategy. These include the Sports and Recreation Forum, the Health Forum, the Natural Environment and Waterways Group. This Study however focuses on facility and amenity needs whilst the Sports and Recreation Forum focuses more generally on promotion, participation and the formulation of a sports strategy. A multi-agency approach is therefore advocated. Some of the objectives in relation to recreation, amenity and facility provision are elaborated on in this Study and the same agencies are identified for delivery of these objectives in Chapter 9 of this document. The preparation of the Sports Strategy by the Sports and Recreation Forum will also have regard to proposals set out in this needs assessment Study.

An interim report on progress entitled “Priority Action Plan 2005 – 2008” was published in April 2006 updating the 2002 – 2012 strategy. Priorities include establishing a local sports partnership and appointing a city sports co-ordinator; publishing a sports directory; completing and implementing a sports strategy; carrying out a sports/recreational needs analysis; and developing a waterways strategy incorporating a programme of maintenance works.

## **Galway City Habitats Inventory 2005**

The Galway City Habitats Inventory 2005 was approved by the City Council as part of the ongoing Strategy for Economic, Social and Cultural Development 2002 – 2012 identified above. It has provided an important input into the City Development Plan and provides the rationale for maintaining a balance between meeting current and future recreational needs and the need to protect the environment.

The Inventory contains the identification and strategic audit of areas of ecological importance. Key recommendations of the Inventory include the designation of any nationally or internationally important habitats as SACs or NHAs; establishing a network of Local Biodiversity Areas and listing these in the City Development Plan; preparing a management plan for each designated area and Local Biodiversity Area; protecting freshwater wetlands and watercourses; protecting the best areas of grassland, heath and peatland; protecting broadleaved woodland from overgrazing and invasive species; retaining hedgerows and stone walls as part of ecological networks and corridors; protecting exposed limestone; ensuring rocky coastlines are not modified by armouring or discharge of pollutants.

*A list of documents consulted is contained in Appendix 1.*

### **Summary**

From the review of policy it is clear that there is a significant deficiency in up to date and relevant national guidance on parks, open space and recreation facilities. Where national policy is not deficient, significant progress has been made in terms of service and facility delivery, for example in the development of children's play grounds. It is notable that, where national policy is most deficient in open space management, local policy is most needed to be developed. In the past, lack of national funding opportunities for parks, open space and recreation facilities has also limited recreational development. Lack of national guidance should however not limit the City Council in progressing a joint policy approach across all aspects of open space, amenity and recreation provision. This will be greatly assisted by the recommendations of this Study.