

9

SDCC Public Realm Pre Planning Guidance

The 'public realm' is a collective term for the spaces between buildings where the general public have access. The public realm of any proposed development relates to that part of a proposal that is intended to be publicly owned or maintained and includes streets, pathways, rights of way, parks and open spaces and any public and civic building and facility. Planning control is important to ensure the appropriate provision for the public realm.

The quality of the public realm in South Dublin can be a significant factor in the quality of the lives of all people who live, work and visit the county. Public spaces designed with care and implemented with skill, are fit for purpose, are visually attractive, engender a sense of pride in a place, enable all persons to use them with ease, may discourage crime, promote healthy living and increase land values. Such spaces can also conserve and enhance biodiversity, ensure sustainable urban drainage and maintain ecological corridors. Conversely, poorly conceived public spaces often reinforce negative perceptions of a place, and all too often public realm is overlooked as the left over spaces between buildings.

Achieving the highest standards of design and use of the public realm is an important consideration in the planning and design of the physical environment and presents a number of challenges and opportunities. The provision of safe, legible well-lit and clearly defined routes and spaces adds value to our environment. There is considerable scope to ensure that the public realm develops in a manner that is genuinely inclusive. Applicants and developers have a key role in how developments affect the public realm and how well the detailed design and construction of spaces and places will determine the function and success of the built environment. This can include how street furniture and seating that provides resting areas, should be provided.

Legibility is a design concept which makes it easier for people to work out where they are and where they are going. Not only does it minimise the length of journeys by avoiding wrong turns, for some it may make journeys possible to accomplish in the first place. It should be considered as part of public realm design and in its simplest form is based on movement relative to fixed points within the environment. Elements such as landmark buildings, natural features, clear sightlines and vistas in conjunction with signage and information contribute towards legibility and perform important functions for wayfinding, particularly for the elderly or people with cognitive impairments.

The public realm for residential streets should provide clear accessible streets that support walking and encourage social interaction within the whole community. Home zones in residential areas provide streets in which the road space is shared between drivers of motor vehicles and other road users, with the wider needs of residents in mind. The aim is to change the way that streets are used and to improve quality of life, by making them places for people, rather than just traffic. One of the objectives of home zones is to benefit the less mobile, such as children, older people and people with mobility difficulties who can reclaim their local territories from exclusively car-oriented activities.

Developments that include public realm proposals should provide for the following:

- Accessible public open space that retains natural or manmade landscape features such as trees, hedges, rivers/ streams using minimal visual or physical clutter;
- A landscape design that creates welcoming open spaces or a parkland setting, or a landscape to enhance an urban setting complements the character of the area;
- A layout which allows the use of sustainable forms of transport such as cycling, walking and public transport, with clearly defined footpaths and cycleways linking all buildings and public areas. Parking areas should not be a dominant feature.
- The location of public space close to public transport connections and interchanges or other major linkages.
- Promote greater connectivity and permeability throughout the development through the provision of a network of well-connected public spaces and streets, with materials, and signage that is easily interpreted by all.
- Crossing points and routes should be clearly identifiable, appropriately located with respect to facilities and follow pedestrian desire lines.
- Quality of materials, especially at significant locations is important to sustainable placemaking.