

Lands at Mullagh Road, Maghera - MASTERPLAN

Prepared by Outdoor Recreation NI on behalf of

Mid Ulster District Council



Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council



OUTDOOR
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NORTHERN IRELAND

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This study provides an overview of the process behind the Masterplan, including consultation, desk-based research, options refinement and draws on expert knowledge from similar projects and studies. Based on this, recommendations included works required, estimated costs, next steps and a timeframe to develop the lands at Mullagh Road to provide a community recreation and biodiversity resource.

As part of Council's Maghera, 2017 – 2030, A Physical Development Framework and Action Plan - lack of public, green and play space were identified as constraints as part of the consultation process for the plan. The creation of outdoor recreation space was identified as a theme for potential development, and initiatives for this included:

- Developing walking / cycle trail, and
- Potential development of Walled Garden, Rectory site and environs as recreation / amenity hub

Mid Ulster District Council (MUDC) has recently acquired circa 37 acres of lands between the Mullagh Road / Tobermore Road for economic and recreational development purposes. A significant portion of the land is identified for the provision of recreational green space, to include habitat creation for biodiversity, natural play and a network of community trails, in response to the need for additional outdoor recreational facilities in the Maghera area.

The Site

The lands at Mullagh Road are located north of the A6 Glenshane Road and west of the Mullagh Road, Maghera. The site is currently used for pastoral farming. Within the site are four land parcels separated by field boundaries, as well as several water courses, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). Two small parcels of semi-mature woodland are also present on site.

The lands at Mullagh Road are owned by MUDC and are for consideration within this Masterplan. See Figure 1 for site boundary. There is currently no formal or informal recreation taking place on site. There are currently three access points to the site for agricultural purposes only.

Pedestrian access is currently not permitted. The site does not have a suitable and accessible car park.

The vast majority of the study area is within the flood plain. PPS15 'Planning and Flood Risk' states that 'Floodplains and other land important for flood storage, adjacent to settlements can often form important strategic networks of green spaces commonly referred to as green infrastructure. These areas are often important in terms of **biodiversity**, providing meadowlands and wildlife corridors. They can also be used for **leisure and recreational purposes**. Therefore, the safeguarding of these areas not only offers economic benefits by avoiding flood risk but also delivers benefits in terms of health, social wellbeing and the environment'.

The Need for Development

In summary, the following key learnings can be taken from the public engagement process:

- **Community Support** – There is strong support for the proposal to develop a green space on the lands at Mullagh Road. However, there is a portion of the community which has collaborated under the banner of Maghera Park Action Group who have a deep connection with the site of the Former Maghera High School and therefore are unlikely to support proposals for the lands Mullagh Road. However, Council should continue to engage with this group to ensure they have up to date information of proposals.
- The site should offer the opportunity to exercise, relax and unwind and spend time in nature. Therefore a **balance between recreation and nature connection is important**.
- **A family offering should be incorporated** – particularly for those with pre-primary and primary aged children
- **An offering for those with reduced / limited mobility is important**
- **Increased car parking capacity is essential**
- **Linkages to other parts of Maghera are important**
- **The key components identified by the public engagement process should be considered where appropriate** – see Section 3.3.2

Development proposals

A unique set of considerations and challenges presented themselves for the lands at Mullagh Road. These were carefully considered individually and in combination, in order to gain an understanding of the opportunities present on site. Options were then considered that would allow the site to be maximized in terms of its potential as a community biodiversity and recreation resource. One of the key considerations within the Masterplan, is that the majority of the site sits within a floodplain, and only certain kinds of development are permitted within this landscape e.g. for the purposes of leisure

and recreation, which are sympathetic to the functions and conditions of a flood plain. Options considered included do nothing, partial development and full development (see Table 10).

Biodiversity

With regards to what could be realized on site in terms of a biodiversity resource, additional expert knowledge was sought from relevant NGOs. RSPB NI advised that the habitats present on site could be restored to natural habitats that would typically be found in an unaltered river floodplain. Restoration of the site could be achieved by amending elements of its hydrology by damming drainage channels and using earthworks to create a series of pool complexes, resulting in water being retained on site and being allowed to seasonally fluctuate. These actions will create a biodiverse mosaic of habitats such as pools, wet grassland and wet woodland. Hydrological and ecological surveys (beyond the brief of this project) are required to confirm the detail of the biodiversity proposals.

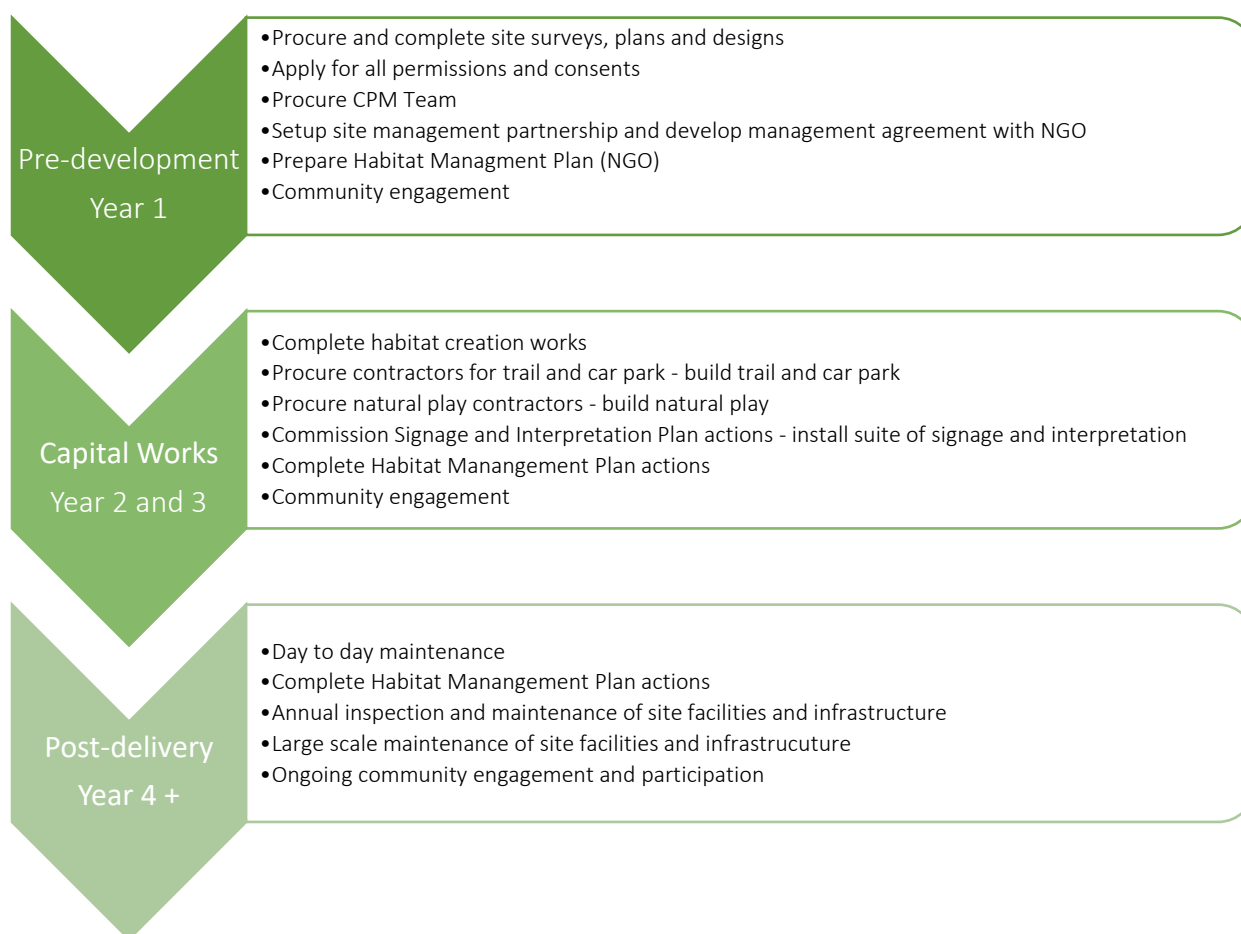
Recreation

In terms of the recreation potential of the site, there is an opportunity to work with the natural functions of the site to provide a valuable community recreational resource. Additional consideration has been given to ensure that all proposed options are suited to being located within a flood plain and hence are likely to be seasonally inundated. Appropriate development and construction techniques are considered to ensure the lifespan of the recreational infrastructure, in this regard. Key elements that are recommended for the site include an accessible path network, suitable play and education facilities, development of linkages to the site, additional car parking infrastructure and a suite of bespoke signage and interpretation.

Summary

Consideration of all options suitable for the lands at Mullagh Road, resulted in proposed biodiversity and recreation resource in the form of 'Maghera Wetland Park'. It will facilitate access to nature and provide recreation infrastructure to support the physical health and mental wellbeing of the local community.

Development proposals reflects the assessment of need and high-level technical feasibility. The pre-development phase is proposed to start in year 1 and habitat creation and visitor infrastructure delivered across year 2 and 3. The recommendations for full development are shown in Figure 1 and are summarised as follows:



Costs

An overview of the indicative costs required to deliver the recommendations put forward in the Masterplan is presented below. Also included are costings for partial development of the site, but the recommendation of the Masterplan is for the full development option. For a detailed breakdown of costings, see Table 10. For annual post-development revenue costs, see Table 11.

Element	Development Options	
	Partial Development	Full Development
Pre-development		
Consultancy services	£87,670	£112,610
Capital Works		
Preliminaries	£134,174	£179,024
Path network	£199,000	£319,000
Access	£340,995	£366,995
Natural Play	£200,000	£300,000
Habitat Creation	£141,000	£149,000
Additional facilities	£3,000	£27,000

Signage	£10,500	£31,500
Subtotal	£1,028,669	£1,372,519
Total (Pre-development + Capital)	£1,116,339	£1,485,129
Contingency (15%)	£167,451	£222,769
Inflation to Q1 2024 (8.6%)	£110,406	£146,879
Total Cost	£1,394,196	£1,854,778

Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan

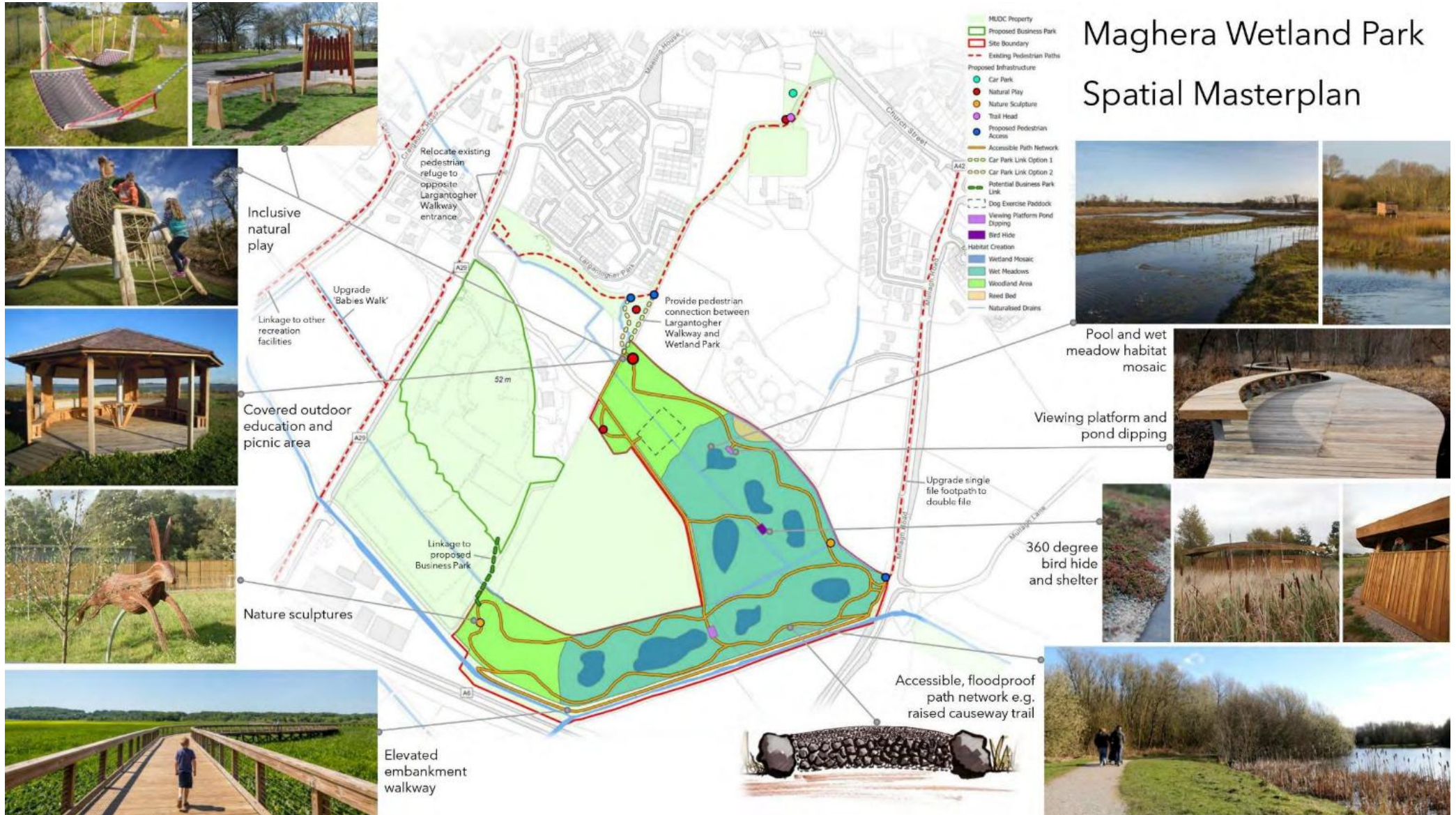


Figure 1 Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan

CAVEATS

The Masterplan proposals have been progressed to a high-level concept design stage only, in order to inform future decision making regarding the approach to development of the site.

Concept design is the broad outline of initial ideas without any technical detail or specifications – this follows at detailed design stage, once Council has decided which elements of the project to take forward for capital development. As such there is further work, assessments and surveys to be undertaken before any recommended projects can be delivered on the ground.

Two versions of the site boundary have been considered in this Masterplan. During the desk-based research and local community engagement stages of the plan, a larger site boundary (including a link to the Tobermore Road and an additional field) were included. Due to changes in MUDC's requirements, this site boundary was amended to remove these elements. The recommendations for the Masterplan are thus based on the amended site boundary. See Figure 3 for detail.

PART 1//

1 INTRODUCTION

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (ORNI) was appointed by Mid Ulster District Council (hereafter referred to as 'Council' or MUDC) to complete a Masterplan for the development of lands adjacent to Mullagh Road, Maghera. The aim was to -

'Complete a Masterplan that will provide an indication of the proposed works required to fully develop the aforementioned lands as a local outdoor environmental resource and recreational hub. This will be a site developed primarily for the local community to include a range of outdoor recreation and environmental products, accompanied by appropriate visitor servicing'.

This Masterplan provides an indication of proposed works, including timeframe, next steps, and estimated costs required to develop the Lands at Mullagh Road as an environmental and recreational resource.

1.1 Scope of study

To achieve this aim, the study was divided into two stages –

STAGE ONE - OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- Carry out a desktop review of existing strategies applicable to the region
- Consult with agencies/stakeholders, local community, as well as staff and Councillors to ensure incorporation of ideas and feedback into the scoping study
- SWOT Analysis
- Identify sustainable land management and environmental opportunities best suited to the site
- Explore a sustainable balance between the economic, environmental and social functions of the site
- Current infrastructure and condition audit. This will include detailed mapping using GIS.
- Explore the opportunity for linkages and routes within and external to the site. Explore how the site offers access to the town, local landscapes and other neighbouring visitor attractions
- Identify any potential barriers to development
- Determine what is currently available within the wider area for outdoor recreation, to include visitor data, and explore what capacity there is within the site to accommodate further outdoor recreation and educational activities
- Present options paper for approval

STAGE TWO - DEVELOPMENT PLAN

- Identify phased, viable and sustainable recreational, educational and social activities which could be delivered within the scope of the Development Plan. Proposals should aim to enhance user/visitor experience, whilst supporting biodiversity and local heritage
- Explore potential local business/social economy options to use the site
- Recommendation and Actions
- Detailed Development Plan costs and profiled timetable of expenditure
- Identify suitable funding streams and timetables

1.2 Methodology

The study was completed by ORNI using the research method outlined in Fig.1 and detailed in APPENDIX A.

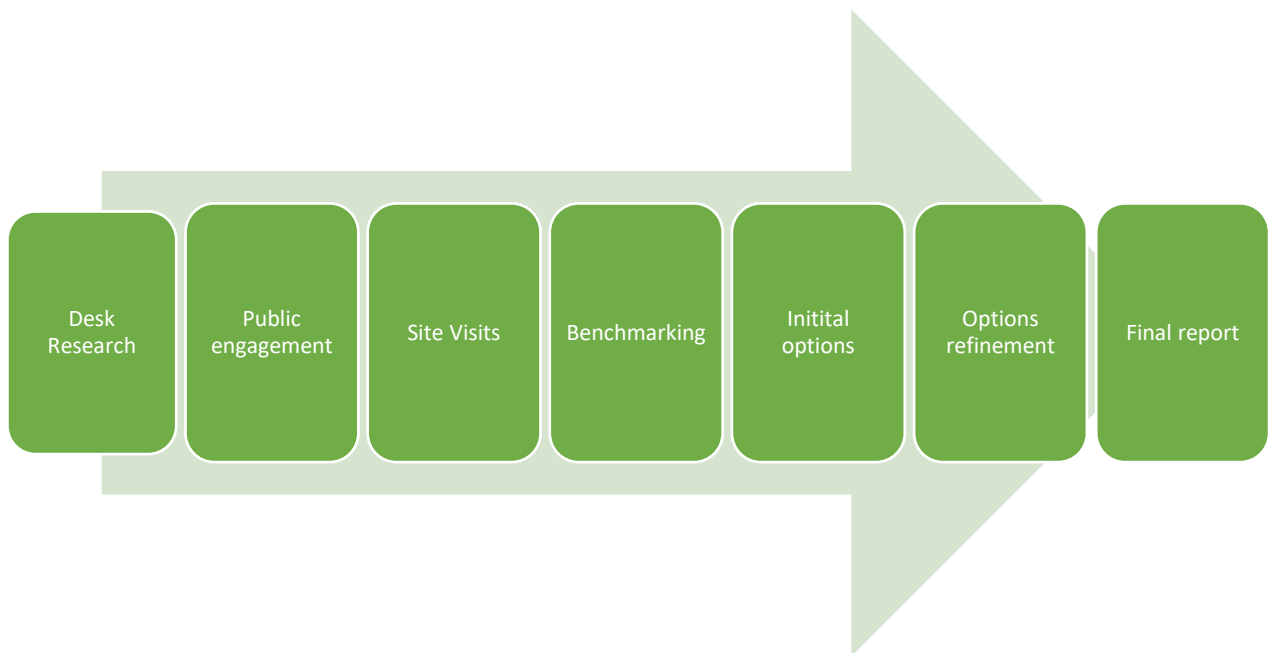


Figure 2 Overview of Methodology Employed

2 The Site

The lands at Mullagh Road are located north of the A6 Glenshane Road and west of the Mullagh Road, Maghera. Within the site are four land parcels separated by field boundaries. Also within the site are several water courses, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). See Section 4.4 for further detail. Two small parcels of semi-mature woodland are also present on site.

2.1 Landownership

The boundary of the study area, plus known landownership of neighbouring and adjoining sites can be seen in Figure 3. All lands shown within the red dashed line, are owned by MUDC and are considered within this Masterplan. The solid red line shows the boundary of the site that was used during the desk research and local community engagement stages of the plan, but which was subsequently amended due to a change in MUDC's requirements. Other relevant lands owned by the Council are also shown.

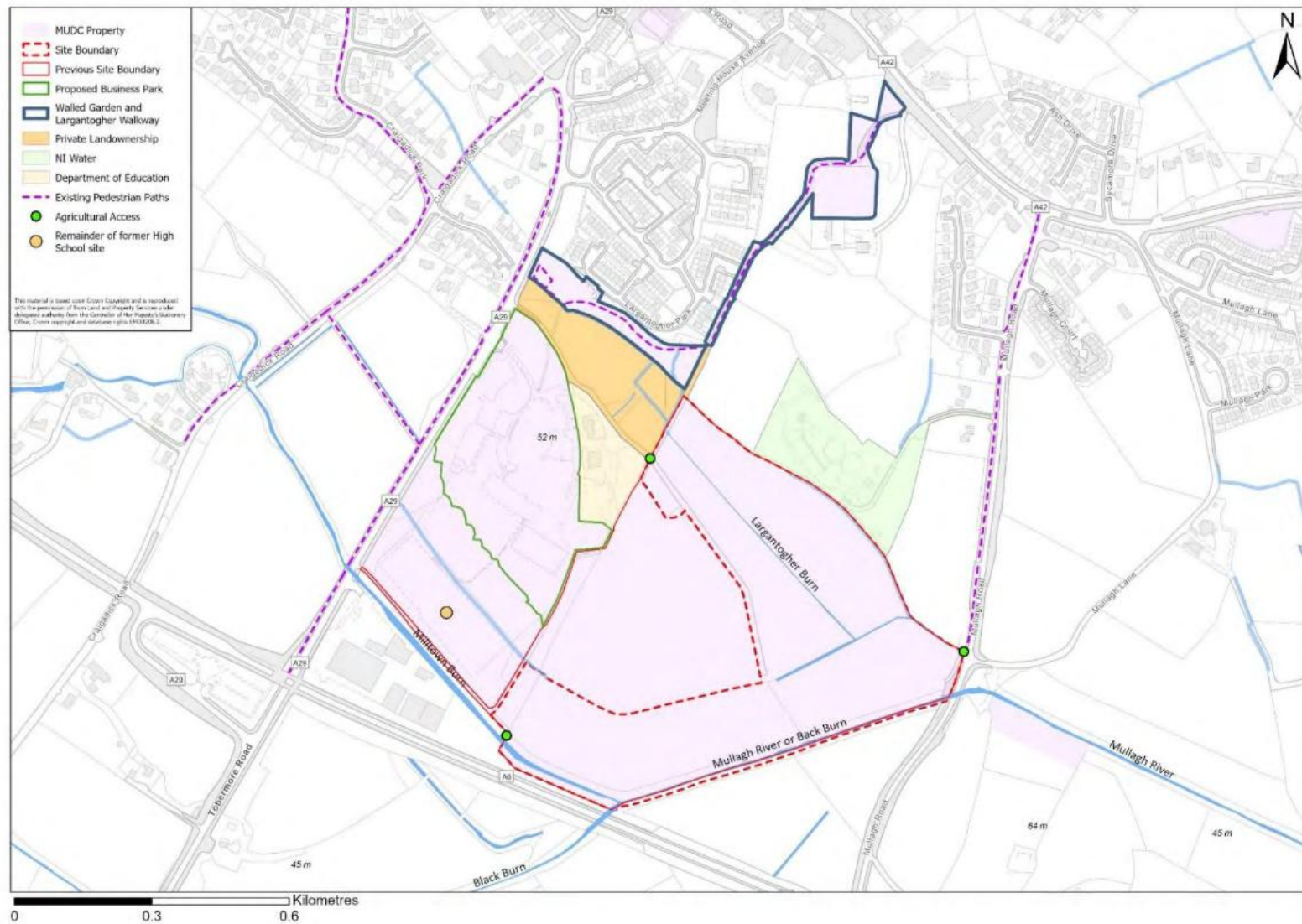


Figure 3 Study area and neighbouring landownership

2.2 Vehicular Access

There is a short access laneway at the east of the site, opposite the entrance to Mullagh Lane and the Council owned Mullagh car park and picnic site. This is used by agricultural vehicles to access the site from the east. This is considered within the study as a potential access point for visitors to the site.



Figure 4 Access point at the east of the site from the Mullagh Road

Two additional laneways provide access to the site; however, Council has advised these are not to be considered as potential access options. These are:

- i. A gravel surfaced laneway to the west of the site that links the site to the A29 Tobermore Road. This laneway is used by and only suitable for off road/ agricultural vehicles to access the pastoral farmland within the site.
- ii. A gravel surfaced laneway to the west of the site that is used to provide access from the A29 Tobermore Road to a Department of Education storage facility. This access point is also used for agricultural vehicle access via a laneway that travels north to south through the site.



Figure 5 Access laneways i and ii leading from Tobermore Road

2.3 Pedestrian Access and Usage

There is no formal pedestrian access to the site, therefore any access is currently informal in nature and typically gained via the aforementioned vehicular access points.

Figure 6 shows pedestrian usage of roads and paths within the vicinity of the site. Figure 6 shows this visually, via Strava heat maps¹. It should be noted that the data presented is for pedestrian usage only i.e. including running and walking.

Level of pedestrian usage	Roads and paths
High	Tobermore Road Largantogher Walkway
Medium	Mullagh Road Lower Sports Pitch (Former Maghera High School Site)
Low	Northern end of Former Maghera High School Site Babies Walk

Table 1 Existing paths and level of usage

There is pedestrian usage on all sides of the proposed site and therefore the provision of a facility for off-road walking would provide a more positive user experience and reduce the interaction between pedestrians and vehicles.

¹ Visual representation of routes logged by Strava users, via GPS. Does not represent users who have not logged their route using this platform.



Figure 6 Strava heat map showing pedestrian routes in the locality of the site²

2.4 Linkages

The existing pedestrian paths in Maghera in relation to the site are as follows (see Figure 3):

- The A29 Tobermore Road which has a footpath on both sides of the road when traveling south, as far as the entrance to the former Maghera High School site. The footpath then continues south on the western side of the road.
- A footpath on the western side of the Mullagh Road, which ends at the farm access point on the Mullagh Road. This footpath narrows to single file at this point, due to lack of footfall and vegetation encroachment.
- An agricultural access laneway, linking the Craigadick Road to the Tobermore Road, is known locally as 'Babies Walk'. See Figure 7. This route is used informally for walking in the vicinity of

² Purple = high levels of activity, orange = lower levels of activity

the study area and provides linkages to the western side of Maghera between the Tobermore Road and Craigadick Road.



Figure 7 Babies Walk, and car parking and open space at the Walled Garden

2.5 Car parking

The lands at Mullagh road currently do not have a dedicated car park. In the vicinity of the site, there is parking nearby at the Mullagh Road picnic site, at the Craigadick Park and Ride, to the north of the Walled Garden and along Church Road. See Section 4.5.2 for detail.

2.6 Cycle access

There are no National Cycle Network routes near the study area. There is a local on-road cycle route 'The Swatragh Cycle Route' which passes through Maghera town but does not directly pass the study site.

2.7 Other activities

No activities, other than agricultural activity, are known to occur on site.

3 Assessment of need

This section identifies how the site can deliver benefits to local residents and contribute to meeting the objectives of relevant National and Council strategic plans.

3.1 National strategic plans and research

Outdoor recreation plays a vital role in Northern Ireland, bringing benefits to society by contributing to a wide range of areas including improving health and wellbeing, protecting the environment, tackling inequality, and enhancing education and learning. The benefits of outdoor recreation are widely evidenced, this includes Space to Thrive (2020)³, covering 385 studies on the benefits of parks and green spaces for people and communities.

Research carried out by ORNI in 2022, 'People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland (POMNI)'⁴ showed that 70% of adults spent time outdoors at least once a week. Over three quarters of participants (78%) stated that time outdoors was good for wellbeing, making them feel calm and relaxed. The physical health benefits of spending time outdoors were also important with two in three participants taking visits for exercise or fitness reasons (67%).

The availability and quality of local green and blue spaces, paths and trails can also influence frequency of visits to the outdoors with a clear correlation between frequency of time spent outdoors and the perceived proximity of places to visit. While around a quarter of the population (27%) stated that their nearest green or blue space was within a 5-minute walk of their home, a similar percentage stated that their nearest green or blue space would take more than 20 minutes to reach on foot (20%).

Also, while approximately three in four Northern Ireland residents agreed that their local greenspaces were of a high enough standard to want to spend time there (76%), approximately a quarter didn't agree. Satisfaction with local greenspaces and paths and trails tended to be lowest amongst women, unemployed people, disabled people and residents of rural areas.

An overview of relevant national strategies is provided in Table 1.

Strategy/ Policy	Description
NI Draft Programme for Government (2021)	The following outcomes within the Draft PfG relate to outdoor recreation: - We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives;

³<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/about/insight/research/space-thrive>

⁴<http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POMNI-March-2022-Report.pdf>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment; - Our children and young people have the best start in life; and, - People want to live, work and visit here.
<p>Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland</p>	<p>Outcomes under some of the key Strategic Environmental Outcomes within the strategy include:</p> <p><i>SEO 1 - Excellent air, water, land & neighbourhood quality</i></p> <p>‘An environment with high water environment standards which supports biodiversity and contributes to health and well-being and a living and productive landscape.’</p> <p><i>SEO 2 - Healthy & accessible environment & landscapes everyone can connect with & enjoy</i></p> <p>‘People, places and nature are connected through nature rich routes.’</p> <p>‘Everyone is enabled to connect to the natural environment, each other and their local services through a network of sustainable quality off-road green routes and spaces.’</p> <p>‘Everyone has access to inclusive, shared, welcoming and high-quality outdoor...infrastructure.’</p>
<p>Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework</p>	<p>Improving access to, participation in, and connection to nature is key to achieving the following targets outlined in the Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Delivering measurable and population-wide improvements in wellbeing, focusing on educational, social and economic benefits associated with the connection between people and their environment; - Developing natural green connectors and corridors across cities, towns and landscapes, connecting people and their environment.
<p>The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland</p>	<p>This Plan has the vision of creating 'a culture of dynamic, sustainable outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland.' The aim of this Plan is to create a place where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are increasing opportunities and improved access and infrastructure for sustained and increased participation for everyone in outdoor recreation; - There are accompanying benefits to local communities, especially those who are socially excluded in terms of health, social inclusion, cohesion, equality and economic development; and,

	- People enjoy the outdoors and show a high degree of responsibility for themselves, towards others and towards the environment they are using, and play their part in maintaining, supporting and enhancing our environment and heritage.
Passion, Our Place NIEA Strategic Priorities 2012 - 2022	Under the 'People and Places' priority, a strategic goal of NIEA is to give 'extensive opportunity for everyone to appreciate and enjoy the natural and built environment'.

Table 2 Overview of Strategic need in relation to the Mullagh Road site

3.2 Relevant MUDC Plans and Reports

The table below gives an overview of how the development of a recreation resource at Mullagh Road would help deliver relevant MUDC plans and reports.

Plan/ Report	Description
Local Development Plan 2030 – Draft Plan Strategy	Recognises that 'outdoor recreation provides many cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits and contributes positively to physical and mental health and a better quality of life. Everyone should have easy access to open space and the opportunity to participate in sport and outdoor recreational pursuits'.
Our Community Plan 2017 -10 year plan for Mid Ulster	Several of the key outcomes of the Plan reflect those of the PfG such as 'valuing and enhancing our environment' and 'being better enabled to live longer and healthier lives'. Under the Health and Wellbeing Theme, the Plan promises to deliver a recreation and active lifestyle plan which will provide formal and informal recreation and play opportunities.
MUDC Outdoor Recreation Strategic Plan (2017)	This Plan recognises, that although the wider MUDC area has a high-quality natural resource base, there is significant opportunity to further increase the outdoor recreation opportunities available. There is an overwhelming demand for a formal network of Community Trails to be developed across the area, and this is a key recommendation of the Plan.
MUDC Public Parks and Play Five Year Strategic Plan 2019 - 2024	Two formal play areas exist in Maghera for the enjoyment of children. There are no formal or informal natural play areas in the town. The Plan noted that the Walled Garden in Maghera should be considered by Council with regards public park and play, to improve Maghera town centre. Recommendations for inclusive play were also included as well as a recommendation for a risk-benefit approach to play, ensuring challenging play opportunities are developed.

MUDC Pitches and Condition Survey and Strategy 2022 (Draft)	Specific to the audit of facilities and clubs of five key sports (football, gaelic games, hockey, lawn bowls and rugby), and is focused on potential developments at Council owned sites that provide for these sports. One key action is that Council should look to offer recreational opportunities and activities to complement sport at their pitch sites.
Maghera, 2017 – 2030, A Physical Development Framework and Action Plan	Lack of public, green and play space were identified as constraints as part of the consultation for the plan. The creation of outdoor recreation space was identified as a theme for potential development, and initiatives for this included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing walking / cycle trail • Potential development of Walled Garden, Rectory site and environs as recreation / amenity hub

Table 3 Overview of MUCD plans and reports in relation to the Mullagh Road site

3.3 Public engagement and Visitor Profile

The brief for the Masterplan is to develop the site for the local community, therefore it was of paramount importance the local community was offered the opportunity to influence the outcome. Local community engagement was undertaken via:

- Online survey - 161 responses
- Online workshop – 25 attendees
- In person workshop – 16 attendees
- One-to-one engagement with 8 local community organisations (see list within APPENDIX B - Consultees)

3.3.1 Maghera Park Action Group

Maghera Park Action Group are ‘...the community's voice to advocate for the reuse of the former Maghera High School site as a public park for all’⁵. The group is opposed to the Council’s proposal to develop the site of the former Maghera High School site as a new mixed-use Enterprise Centre and Business Park. At the time of writing the planning application for this proposal is under consideration by the Department for Infrastructure Strategic Planning Division (DFI Planning).

⁵ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

Whilst it is not within ORNI's brief to consider proposals for the former Maghera High School site, a commitment was made to the group during the local community engagement that their views would be included within the engagement outputs.

It is ORNI's assessment that the group has a strong emotional and legacy connection to the former Maghera High School Site. In summary, this formed by:

- Many of the group either attended the school or utilised the swimming pool or attended summer schemes which ran cross-community participation programmes. It is understood the school was operational from the 1960s until it closed in or around 2009/2010. The Council acquired the site, and the buildings were subsequently demolished.
- It is also understood that between the closure of the school 2009/2010 and 2017, the site was accessible and therefore utilised for informal recreation and community events. However, it was not managed by the Council as a formal recreation site.
- In 2017, the site was fenced off by the Council, however, unpermitted public recreation use continued. Anecdotal evidence indicates the volume of use increased from March 2020 as the community sought local green space during the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. This in turn introduced the site to some members of the community for the first time.

In turn, the group is opposed to the proposed development of the lands at Mullagh Road as it cannot replace their deep connection with the former Maghera High School site. The group's key arguments are presented via three strategic emails which were generated from the group's campaign website.⁶

To generate an email the sender was required to enter their name and email address to indicate their support to a pro-forma email. ORNI received 192 emails during the public engagement period. It is noted that many senders generated emails on more than one email topic, therefore 192 reflects the number of emails rather than the number of senders. The detail of each email is provided within Appendix C and excerpts of key points are summarised verbatim in Table 4 below:

⁶ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

Date Received	Submissions	Key Points
18/02/2022 – 02/03/2022	61	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Mullagh Road Masterplan process is deeply flawed in that it does not include the former Maghera High School Site • The Mullagh Road Masterplan must be weighed against the part it plays in realising the concurrent plan by the same developers (MUDC) to destroy existing mature woodlands and recreational space in the neighbouring former Maghera High School site. • For many Maghera residents it is the view that this master plan is simply another in a long line of attempts by Council to push through the industrialisation of existing open and green space. • It makes no environmental or economic sense to destroy this vital amenity (Former Maghera High School site) to attempt to replicate it anew on agricultural lands bereft of biodiversity. It would take many decades to replace the mature trees and habitats of the High School Site. • The Former Maghera High School site is an important part of our natural heritage and place which holds a deep connection for many in our community.
04/03/2022 – 08/03/2022	27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allocation of land (lands at Mullagh Road) to economic activity, and what form this may take, has not been clarified. • Funding of the site is likely to require huge financial commitment from the Council. • Early estimates put costs at around a minimum of £2M. Framing the funding as staged and in need of outside funding opportunities shows a lack of firm commitment from the Council. • Our town already has an easily accessed recreational site which has been used for generations of families across the whole town. I believe developing this natural wood/parkland would be a better of ratepayers' money.
08/03/2022 – 11/03/2022	104	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I would raise objections to the site being offered as the most suitable site in public ownership for community recreation and educational needs in our town, and in particular, the wetlands proposal as an environmental focus for development. • The site is otherwise devoid of any ecological interest or variation. Proposals to utilise the site's majority floodplain status as a potential wetland area will further limit the opportunities to enhance any woodland environment and places a minimally landscaped area, utilising walkways and boardwalks, • The vision of a wetlands development on the Glenshane/Mullagh lands will be prohibitively expensive and dependent on a consistently reliable source of water • Developing these barren fields at Mullagh to make them suitable for recreation would require an economically unrealistic investment and, critically, time, as identified against the urgent need for green provision in Maghera, which will not be fully realised for several generations at least. • Our children and our children's children will be disadvantaged by the huge environmental loss if this proposal enables the destruction of the woodland legacy that forms our High School site. Any suggestion that like-for-like can be provided on Mullagh is simply providing greenwashing to a proposed ecological and community catastrophe to enable the successful progress of Mid Ulster District Council's industrial planning applications, currently with the Dept. for Infrastructure.

Table 4 Overview of email submissions received

3.3.2 Engagement Findings

Importance to the local community

In contrast to Section 3.3.1, the broader community engagement demonstrated strong support for the proposal. Over 80% of survey respondents stated development of the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space is 'very important' to the local community. This was further supported by one-to-one engagement with a theme amongst respondents being the 'best of both worlds' i.e. the lands at Mullagh Road will provide vital green space for recreation and nature connection whilst the proposed mixed-use Enterprise Centre and Business Park will provide local employment.

Q15 How important do you think the development of the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space is to the local community?



Demographic

The online survey highlighted the local community would primarily visit the site with other members of their family (70%), with their children (56%), by themselves (44%), or with their friends (35%).

The importance of a family offering was also identified through the online survey as respondents indicated they had children in the following age categories - post-primary (24%), primary (32%) or secondary (21%), this was further supported by NISRA statistics outlined in Section 3.3.4.

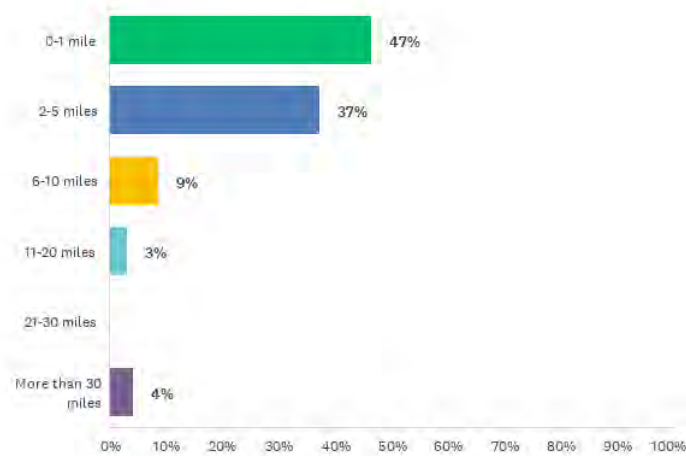
Another key consideration is that 22% of respondents stated that they or someone in their household has reduced / limited mobility.

Access

As the online survey was promoted locally, it is not surprising that the majority of respondents (84%) live within 5 miles of the site. However, the proximity is a useful guide as to how the community will access the site i.e. those living within one mile are more likely to access by foot and those living between 2-5 miles by a vehicle.

This is supported by a separate question in which 48% of respondents stated they were most likely to access the site by foot and 44% by car / van/ minibus.

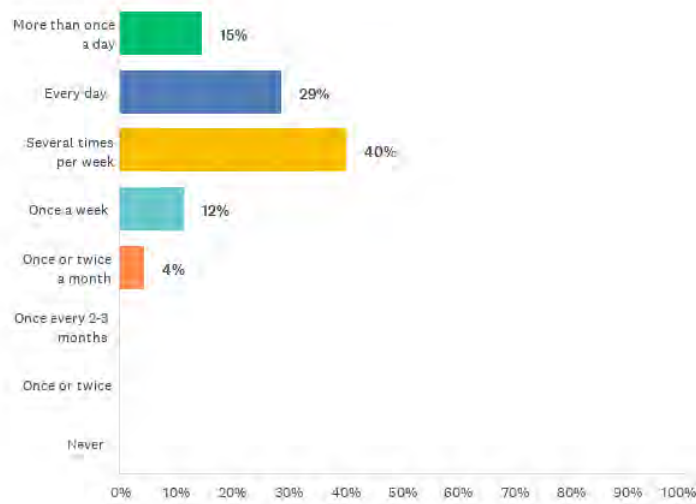
Q8 To the nearest mile, how far from the proposed Mullagh Road Green Space do you live?



Engagement with the outdoors

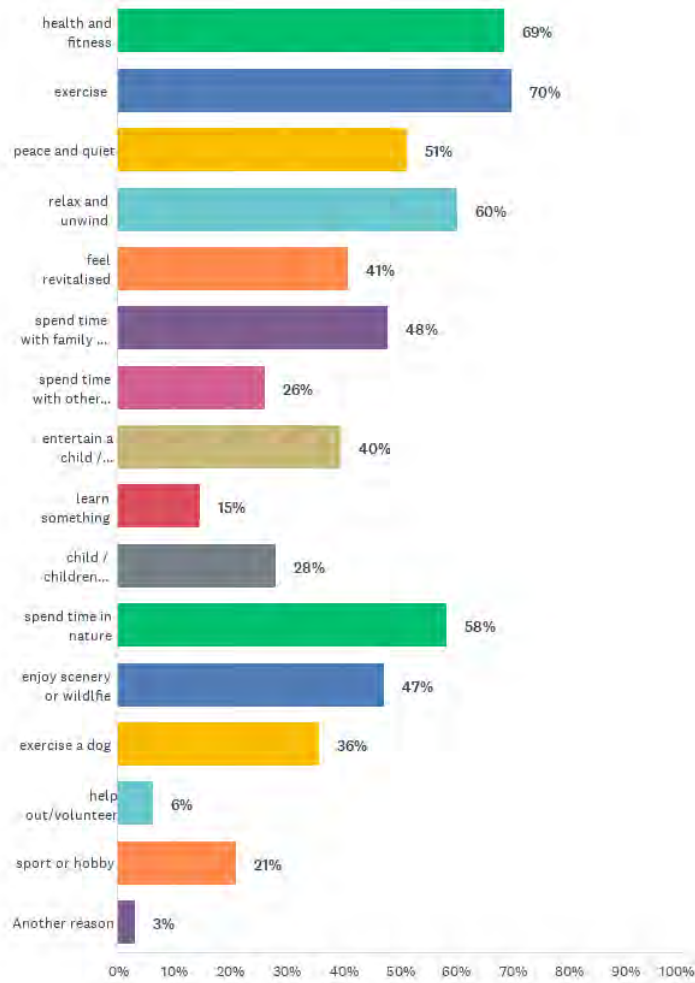
The online survey, supported by face-to-face engagement highlighted a strong connection with the outdoors with 40% of respondents spending leisure time out of doors, away from their home several times a week, a further 29% every day and 15% more than once a day.

Q9 Thinking about the past 12 months, how often, on average, have you spent your leisure time out of doors, away from your home?



When asked for the key reasons to best describe why they made their last visit to the outdoors, the top responses were – exercise (70%), health and fitness (69%), relax and unwind (60%), and to spend time in nature (58%).

Q10 Which of the following reasons, if any, best describes why you made your last visit to the outdoors?



Specific Requirements

The online survey supported by face-to-face engagement provided the opportunity for the local community to highlight the importance of key components to the enhancement of the Mullagh Road Green Space. Table 5 shows the key components that were identified as being ‘absolutely essential’ or ‘very important’ by the online survey.

Components	Absolutely Essential / Very Important
Walking Trails	85 %
Environmental Improvements	85 %
Toilets	70 %
Picnic Facilities	72%
Wildlife Watching	70 %
Formal Car Parking	66 %
Wayfinding	62 %
Formal Play	62 %
Environmental Activities e.g. pond dipping	59%

Table 5 Key components identified via online survey

The survey and face to face engagement also provided the opportunity to suggest other components / ideas. These included:

- **A preference to develop the site of the former Maghera High School.** The argument for this is outlined in Section 3.3.1. Within the online survey this sentiment was made by -
 - 9 of the 142 (6%) respondents to a question asking ‘How important are the following components to the enhancement of the Mullagh Road Green Space?’
 - 32 of the 78 (41%) respondents to a question asking ‘If you have any other comments on the Mullagh Road Green Space, please share them here’
- **Sport Pitches / areas for ball games** – Several sports clubs including GAA and Cricket highlighted the lack of availability to pitches for training and matches. In addition, other requested space for informal ball games.
- **Dog Exercise area** – those engaged stated there was little opportunity to exercise dogs off their leads.
- **Linkages** – those engaged highlighted it was important the site was connected via linkages to other parts of Maghera and other community facilities such as Watty Graham’s GAC
- **Outdoor event space** – those engaged highlighted a desire for a covered space to host small events e.g. community gatherings, group activities, picnics etc.

3.3.3 Public Engagement Key Learnings

In summary, the following key learnings can be taken from the public engagement process:

- **Community Support** – There is strong support for the proposal to develop a green space on the lands at Mullagh Road. However, there is a portion of the community which has collaborated under the banner of Maghera Park Action Group who have a deep connection with the site of the Former Maghera High School and therefore are highly unlikely to ever support proposals for the lands at Mullagh Road. However, Council should continue to engage with this group to ensure they have up to date information of proposals.
- **The site should offer the opportunity** to exercise, relax and unwind and spend time in nature. **Therefore a balance between recreation and nature connection is essential.**
- **A family offering should be incorporated** – particularly for those with pre-primary and primary aged children
- **An offering for those with reduced / limited mobility is essential**
- **Increased car parking capacity is essential**
- **Suitable car parking capacity for user groups such as families and those with limited or reduced mobility, is essential**
- **Linkages to other parts of Maghera are important**
- **The key components within Table 5 should be considered**

3.3.4 Population Statistics

The majority of the urban area of Maghera is located within the Super Output Area (SOA) of 'Maghera', which is ranked the 256th most deprived SOA in NI (in top 28% of most deprived), in terms of living environment domain which identifies the prevalence of shortcomings in the quality of housing, access to suitable housing, and the outdoor physical environment⁷.

The NISRA 2020 mid-year population estimates⁸ provides data for the number of residents within Maghera SOA. For the age group 0-15, 711 residents fell within this category, out of a total number of residents of 2861. This means that 25% of residents in the SOA were aged between 0-15. Compare this with the equivalent data sets for the whole of Northern Ireland, where 21% of residents were aged 0-15, it can be said that Maghera SOA has a higher than average percentage of residents who are children.

⁷ NISRA Statistics 2017

⁸ NISRA 2020 Mid-year Population Estimates

3.4 Summary

It is clear that there are significant benefits to accessing quality green space on a regular basis. Considered and appropriate development at the Mullagh Road site will play a key role in achieving this as well as helping Council address targets and deficiencies presented in its relevant outdoor recreation plans and reports.

4 Considerations and challenges

Proposals must take account considerations challenges that may affect development on site. These are discussed in more detail below.

4.1 Magherafelt Area Plan 2015

Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 was used to lay out the land use proposals that guides development decisions within the District between 2000-2015. Although 7 years out of date, the Plan still takes precedence, given that a new plan has not yet been published. The emerging new Mid Ulster Local Development Plan 2030 for the District is currently in preparatory stage and holds draft status. This was previously discussed in Section 3.2.

Figure 8 shows the lands at Mullagh Road are within the MA13 Local Landscape policy Area. A small section of the site is also classified as 'a major area of existing open space'.

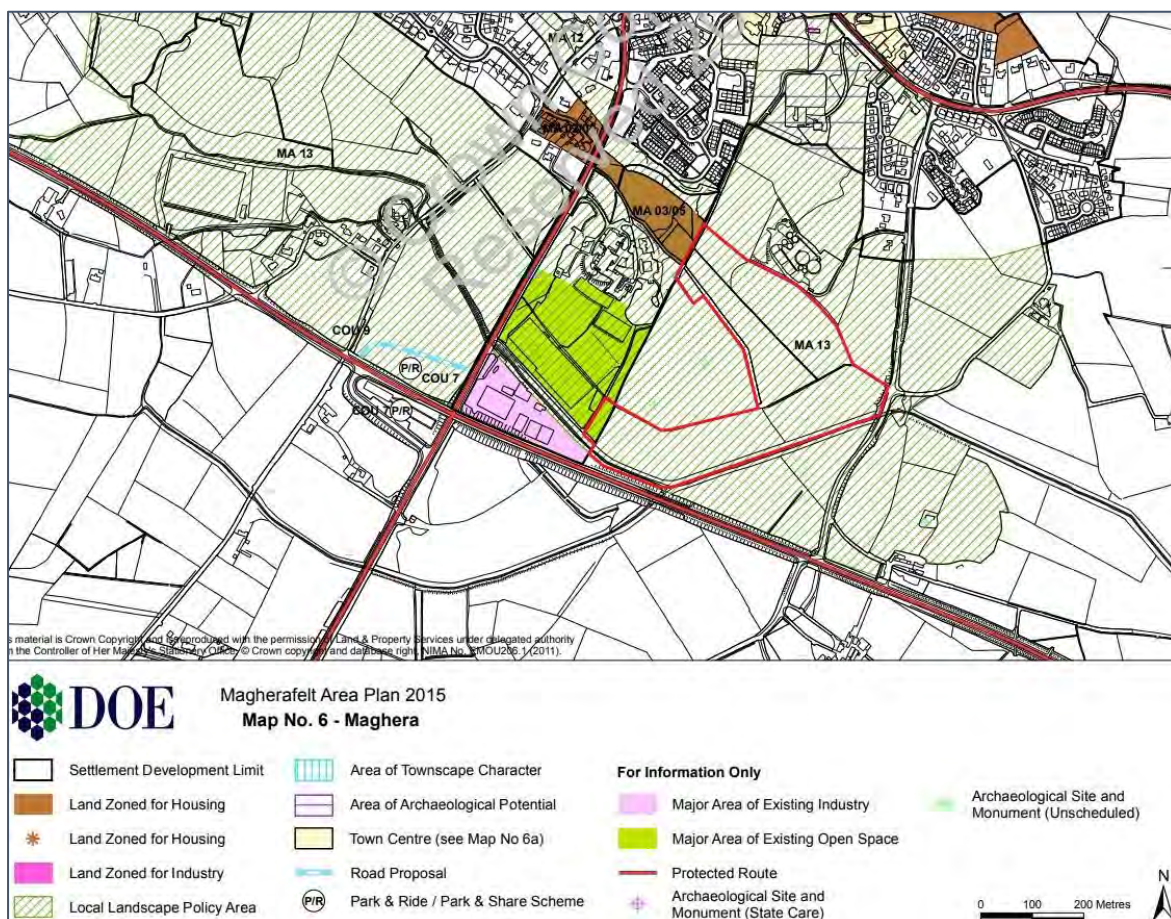


Figure 8 Magherafelt Area Plan 2015, plus available lands (outlined red)

Those features and areas that contribute to the environmental quality, integrity or character of MA 13 are listed below:

- An area of distinctive landscape comprising the slopes to the south of the town and the river floodplain, historically used and transformed in various ways. It combines farmland with mature designed landscaping.
- Attractive green slopes and a significant wetland landscape characterised by streams and associated vegetation define the hilltop setting of the town and provide distinctive views from the A6 Road;
- The stream corridor and associated wetlands are important as a wildlife corridor and for its landscape, wildlife and heritage interest.

There are also two known archaeological records present adjacent to the site to the west, as noted in Section 4.3. The area of land where the current car park is located adjacent to the Walled Garden is located within an 'area of archaeological potential'.

Development in a LLPA is not precluded, provided it does not adversely impact on the intrinsic qualities that the designation is seeking to protect.

4.2 Natural Heritage

The natural heritage of the site can be divided into two areas. The first is an area of wet meadow interspersed with drainage ditches (one of which is identified as the Largantogher Burn) and hedgerows with tall trees. The second area is the channel of the Milltown Burn and where it merges with the Black Burn, the Mullagh River (or Back Burn), plus the adjacent embankments and vegetation corridors.

None of the study area is formally designated for its natural heritage interest. The Back Burn is a tributary of the Moyola River which is hydrologically linked to the Lough Neagh and Lough Beg Ramsar, ASSI and SPA sites. Sections of woodland around the Walled Garden leading south towards the Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW), are identified as being a Priority Habitat (woodland) and are listed in the NI Ancient Woodland Inventory and classified as long-established woodland.

To date, the study area has not been included within any ecological studies to record the natural heritage interests on site. Lands to the west of the study area, at the former Maghera High School (MHS) site where a separate planning application is currently active, have been included within ecological studies. These studies found badger setts along the boundary between the current study area and the former MHS site. ORNI found badger footprints within the study area during a site walkover. Badgers and their setts are protected under the Wildlife Order (Northern Ireland) 1985 as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, and any proposals will

need to be cognisant of the presence of this protected species. Japanese Knotweed is also noted to be present in the northern corner of the site. This species is highly invasive, and it is an offence to plant or encourage it to grow (as would occur if cut and removed from site). It is the responsibility of the landowner to manage the plant, either through biosecurity measures or eradication through specialist treatment or licensed disposal.

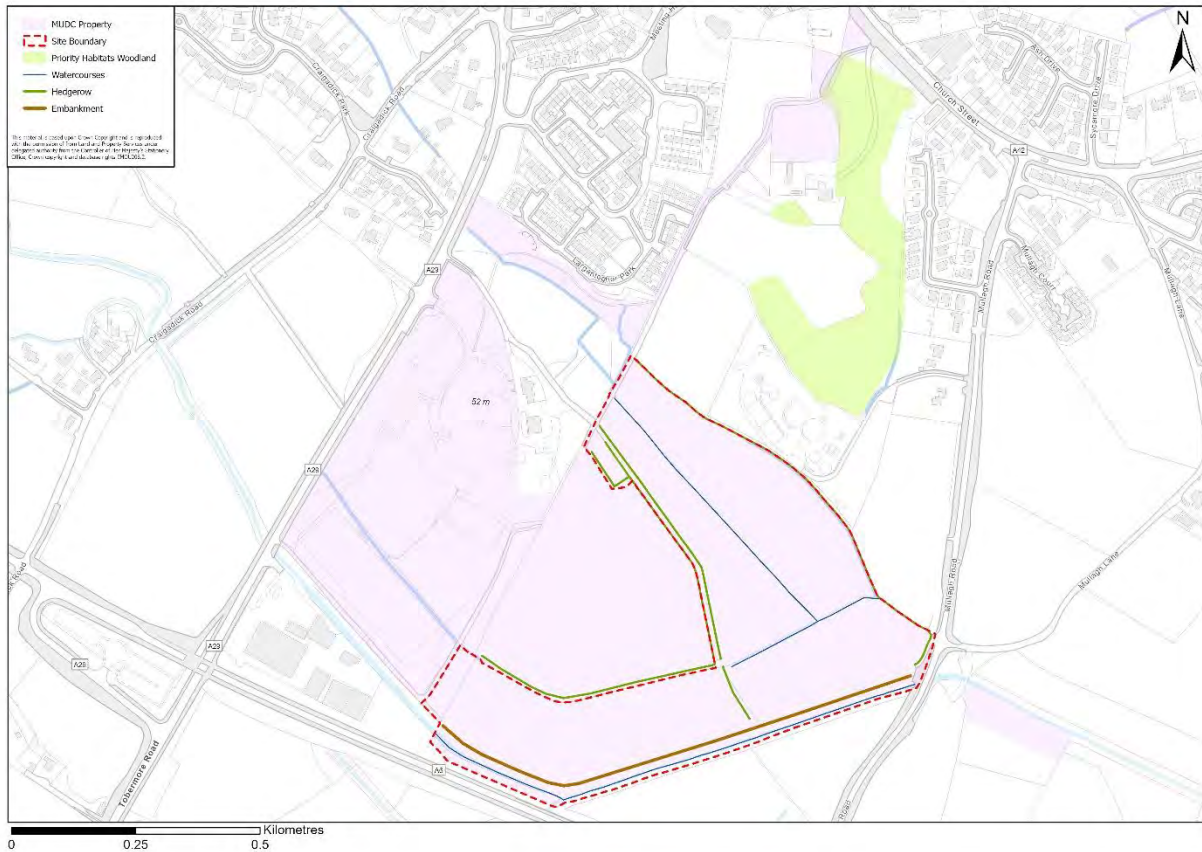


Figure 9 Natural heritage interest within and around the site

4.3 Built Heritage

There are no scheduled or unscheduled built heritage records within the proposed site. There are two locations adjacent to the study area that are listed on the Built Heritage Sites and Monuments record. These are detailed below and can be seen in Figure 10, along with the historic design of the landscape from 1860 and 1905.

SMR	Site Type	Details	Grid reference	Condition
LDY036:034	A.P Site	Cropmark	H8528099600	No visible remains, all above ground features removed. Identified by aerial photograph in harvested field.
LDY036:033	A.P Site	Tree ring	H8518099520	No visible remains, all above ground features removed. Identified by aerial photograph in harvested field.

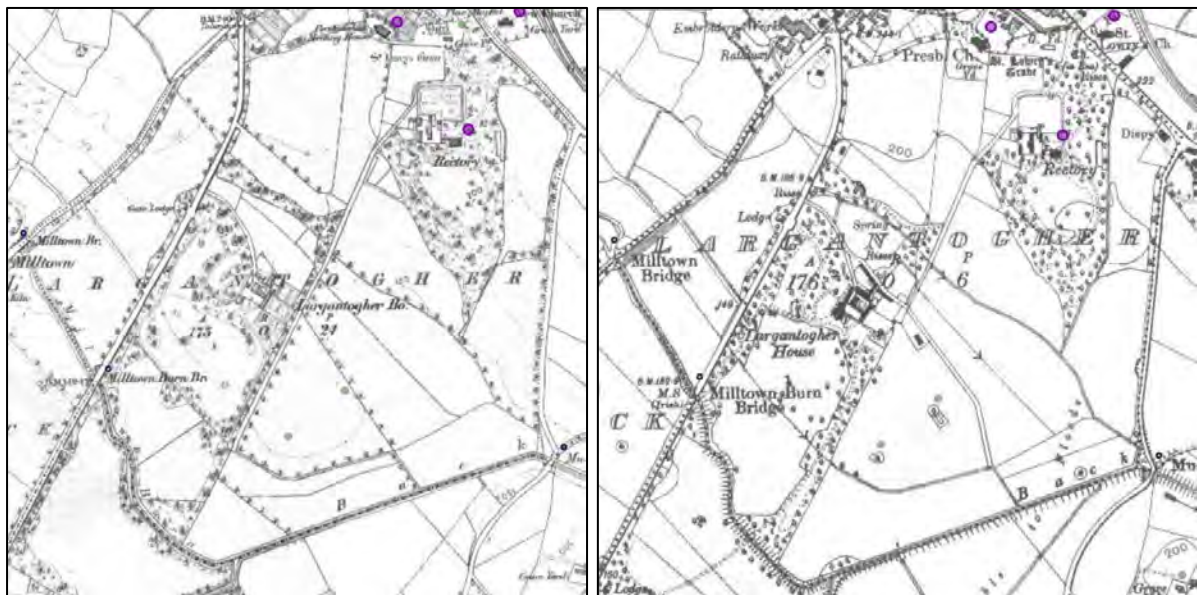


Figure 10 Historic maps of the study area from 1860 and 1905

Figure 10 shows that the land use of the study area has not changed over time i.e. that it has historically been used for agricultural purposes. The presence of a historic access lane to Largetogher House, from the Rectory SW towards the Milltown Burn is noted. The presence of drainage channels, hedgerows and the channelised Back Burn, are all in the same location that they were pre-1860.

4.4 Hydrology

4.4.1 Overview

There are several watercourses on site, namely the Largantogher Burn, Milltown Burn, Black Burn and the Mullagh River (or Back Burn). These watercourses and their direction of flow can be seen in Figure 11.

The vast majority of the study area is within the flood plain. PPS15 'Planning and Flood Risk' states that 'Floodplains and other land important for flood storage, adjacent to settlements can often form important strategic networks of green spaces commonly referred to as green infrastructure. These areas are often important in terms of **biodiversity**, providing meadowlands and wildlife corridors. They can also be used for **leisure and recreational purposes**. Therefore, the safeguarding of these areas not only offers economic benefits by avoiding flood risk but also delivers benefits in terms of health, social wellbeing and the environment'.

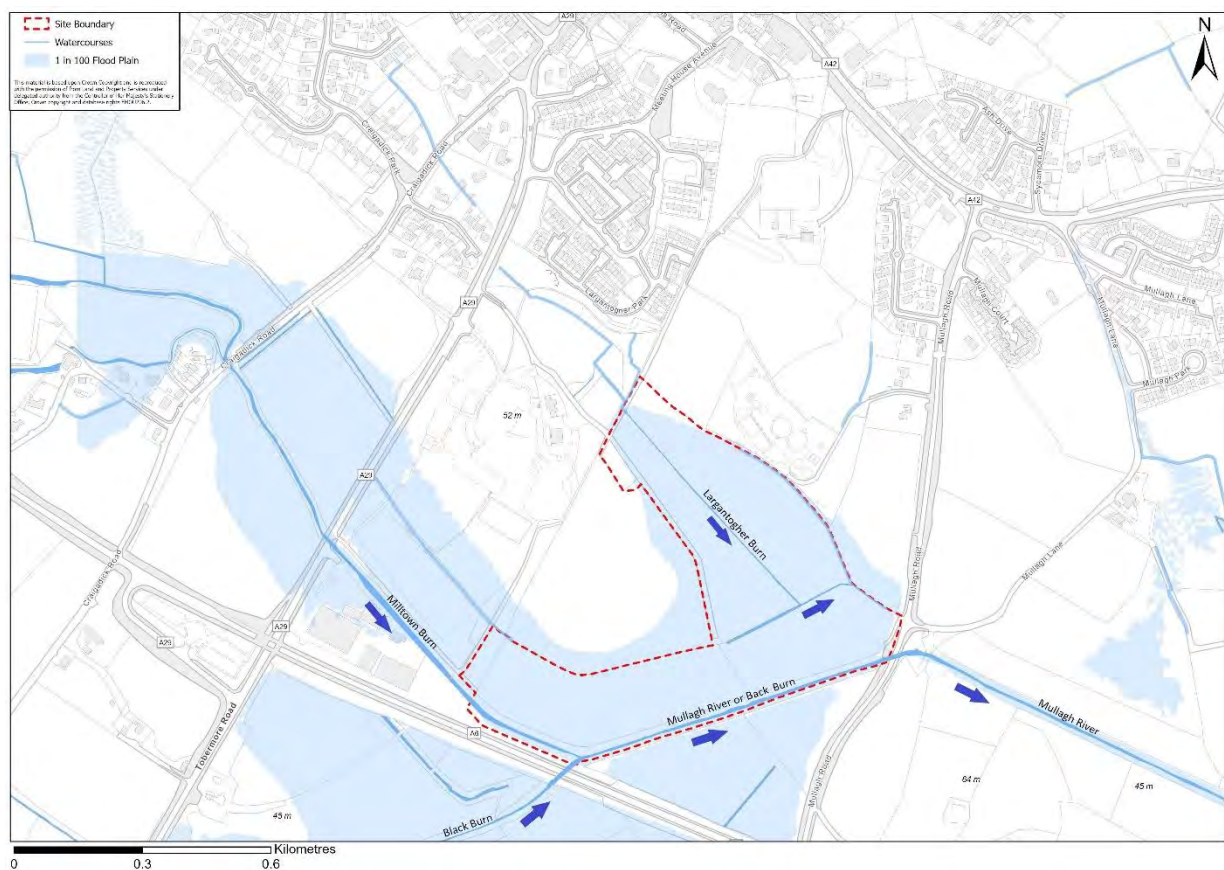


Figure 11 Flood plain location in relation to study area

DfI Flood Maps NI (Floods Directive 2nd Cycle) states that a historical flood event occurred in October 1990. Flooding on site is anecdotally known to occur on an annual basis, the image that can be seen in Figure 12 shows a flood event that occurred in January 2022.



Figure 12 Flooding at the Mullagh Road site in January 2022

4.4.2 Case Study: Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve

The Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve is a 50 hectare wetland nature reserve beside the River Great Ouse at Old Wolverton, Milton Keynes. It was formerly an area of pasture turned into a quarry and restored to the grassland flood plain of the River Ouse. It is now managed as a Nature Reserve and public park by The Parks Trust and was opened to the public in 2016.

Restoration –

After quarrying extraction ceased, materials on site were landscaped in order to form a mosaic of channels, islands and bars, that would work with the natural flooding functions of the site. As well as the new channels and islands, the re-formed landscape included a number of isolated pools and ponds designed to fill through ground water or occasional inundation rather than subject to flowing water.

The fluvial flows from the river combined with the seasonally fluctuating ground water levels means that water levels in the site are uncontrolled and dynamic. No control structures or hard-engineered erosion prevention measures were installed.

Key Issues –

Extensive consultation was undertaken on the project, but the proposal was locally controversial given the site's long-established pastoral character and status as a Linear Park, which some local people felt incompatible with the proposal. However, the Parks Trust developed a strong case for the project, including highlighting the local and national biodiversity action plan targets the project would deliver. Public communication about the natural processes that happen on site and appropriate design of recreation infrastructure have been key to ensure public buy in and stewardship, as well as long term sustainability.

Partnership working –

The Parks Trust obtained the backing of a range of statutory and non-statutory environmental and conservation organisations. The RSPB, Natural England and the Forestry Commission all provided support to the Parks Trust in the development of the nature reserve.

Public Benefits –

The Reserve is freely open to the public with trails, boardwalks, bird hides and site interpretation. It is now a major amenity asset and wildlife attraction in the Ouse Valley Linear Park as is readily accessible by the local population. It provides a valuable green space for people on the northern border of Milton Keynes.

A further public benefit is the increased capacity and more natural functioning of the river floodplain, helping to reduce the risk of flooding to downstream urban areas.



Figure 13 Images from the Floodplain Forest Nature Reserve, before and during a flood event

4.5 Access and Car Parking

4.5.1 Access

Several options have been considered to provide formal pedestrian and vehicular access; the latter also requires consideration of formal car parking – see Section 4.5.2. Table 6 discusses and Figure 14 shows the access points considered.

Access Point	Current Use	Future Use	Notes
Tobermore 1 Gravel laneway linking southwest of site to Tobermore Road	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	N/A	MUDC has advised this is not a viable option
Tobermore 2 Currently used to access the Department of Education storage facility	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	N/A	There is currently a planning application (LA09/2022/03777/O) lodged for this site (including the laneway), comprising of 33 residential units. Primary pedestrian and vehicular access to the site is not conducive alongside these proposals. Secondary pedestrian access to the site may be conducive and can be investigated with the property developer in due course.
Mullagh Road Gravel laneway linking eastern side to Mullagh Road	Agricultural Vehicles Informal pedestrian access (modest)	Formal Pedestrian Access	A public footpath links this access point, northwards along the eastern side of the Mullagh Road to the junction with Church Street. The footpath outside the 30mph zone leading to this access point is single file only. In order for this to be an accessible access point, the footpath should be widened to accommodate double file usage.

			Challenges relating to car parking at this point are outlined in section 4.5.2
Via Proposed Business Park	N/A	Formal Pedestrian Access	<p>MUDC has advised vehicular access will not be possible via the proposed business park.</p> <p>Plans for the proposed business park include a pedestrian walkway starting from the entrance on the Tobermore Road. When developed this will provide a pedestrian linkage to the proposed Wetland Park.</p>
Via Largantogher Walkway	N/A	Formal Pedestrian Access	<p>The preferred primary access point to the site is at the northern most corner of the site, adjacent to the Largantogher Walkway. There is currently no linkage between the site and the Largantogher Walkway. The land between the two locations is in private ownership and permission to develop a linkage here is critical in order to proceed with designing and developing a recreational space within the site. By developing this linkage, the existing Largantogher Walkway can be used to link to existing and potential car parking opportunities at the Walled Garden. This is further outlined in section 4.5.2</p>

Table 6 Overview of current and future access

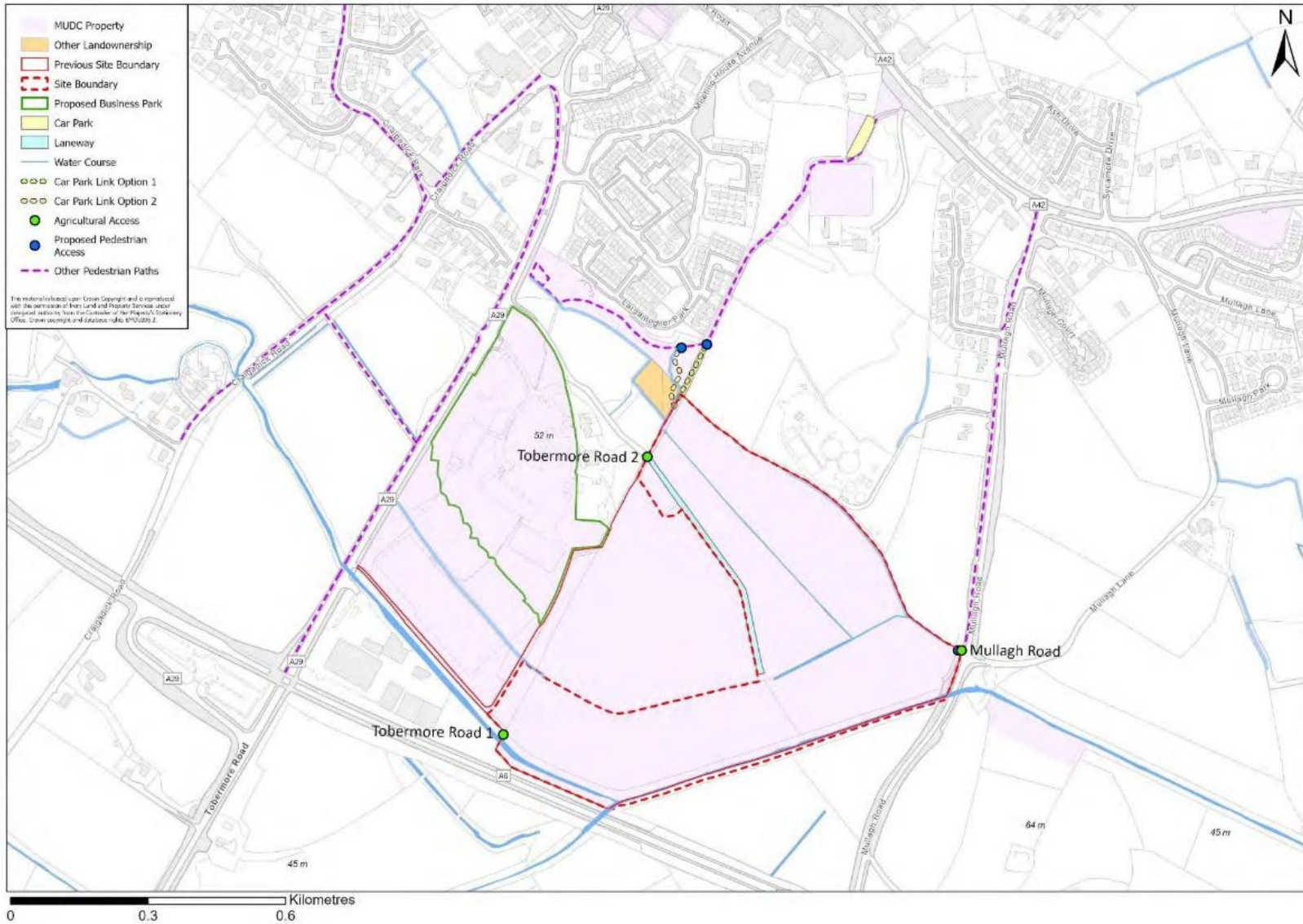


Figure 14 Existing and proposed access to the site

4.5.2 Car parking

The presence of the flood plain covering the majority of the site means the development of a car park within the site is not a viable option. As outlined in Section 4.5, options for car parking are restricted to those outlined in Table 7 below.

Location	Description	Future Use	Notes
Mullagh Road Picnic Site	Approx. 8 spaces, no dedicated disabled parking Bitmac, not marked out	N/A	Requires visitors to cross the Mullagh Road in a 60mph zone, with compromised visibility of traffic due to bend in the road i.e. a crossing point is not viable
Craigadick Park and Ride	123 spaces, inc. 4 dedicated disabled spaces Bitmac	Additional parking	Could be used as an additional/ secondary parking option if accessing the site from the pathway within the proposed Business Park. Not suitable to be the main parking option given its distance from the site.
Walled Garden	Approx. 6 spaces, no dedicated disabled parking	Formal Car Park	As referred to in Section 4.5 above, the preferred primary access point is via the Largantogher Walkway and parking in the vicinity of the Walled Garden to facilitate this. A new pedestrian access point will need to be developed between the Largantogher Walkway and the site, if this car park is to be a viable option to service the site. Existing car parking at this location is limited to 8 spaces with no dedicated disabled parking spaces. Additional parking is available on Church Street (approximately 45 spaces); however, these are typically at capacity. Therefore, enhanced parking facilities are required at the Walled Garden in order to facilitate a wide range of users within the community. Opportunities for this can be seen in Section 6.8

Table 7 Overview of local car parking opportunities

4.6 Summary

The considerations and challenges in relation to the lands at Mullagh Road have been noted and discussed. It is the aim of this Masterplan to recognise and address these through the master planning process, in order to define options that can deliver a valuable green space for recreational use by the local community. None of the constraints or considerations preclude development within the space and considered planning can support and improve factors which may have previously been viewed as a limitation on site.

5 Lands at Mullagh Road, SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Existing network of pedestrian links to the wider community
- 'Blank slate' in terms of development
- Urban fringe location - rural feel but adjacent to urban location for accessibility purposes
- Good views across the entire site
- Low gradients present with the majority of the site being flat, allowing for the development of trails accessible to all
- Hydrological functionality present on site to allow for rewetting and restoration of the floodplain

Weaknesses

- No current formal access for pedestrians
- No dedicated car parking
- No existing recreation infrastructure
- Results of hydrological and ecological studies required before detailed design can occur
- The majority of the site is located within a flood plain - additional considerations required regarding development

Opportunities

- Wider community support for site-appropriate development/enhancements
- Interest from local community for participation in development and maintenance
- Development of community trail network and associated visitor infrastructure, suitable for all members of the community
- Upgrade existing pedestrian linkages to the site
- Enhancement of biodiversity value
- Increase community value and involvement
- Increase educational value and opportunities
- Restore natural hydrological processes of the watercourses and floodplain on site
- To provide a space to reconnect with nature for physical health and mental well being purposes
- For partnership working and sharing of expertise with appropriate NGO
- Co-operative initiatives and community involvement, linking with Walled Garden
- Define and highlight the natural and cultural significances of the site through community engagement and interpretation
- Potential to position as a good practice example of Wetland Park creation in Northern Ireland

Threats

- Opposition to the proposal by a local action group 'Take Action for Maghera Park'
- Perception that proposed development is compensatory for the loss of the High School site
- Perception that any development within a flood plain is precluded
- No existing linkage to Walled Garden car park - permission to access private land required
- Rivers Agency operations to be considered
- Planning permission required
- Poor public awareness of the site
- Partial development of the site resulting in not realising the full potential of the site

PART 2//

6 Recommendations

This section outlines the key recommendations for development within the site with the aim of realising its potential as a community resource in terms of both recreation and nature.

6.1 Context for recommendations

The starting point for all development within the lands at Mullagh Road is to recognise the value of the natural landscape, in the form of working with natural ecosystem services and processes such as permanent inundation and seasonal flooding, and utilising this previously marginalised land to create a biodiverse recreational resource for the local community. Given the constraints that the presence of the flood plain presents, standardised or non-bespoke recreational development and infrastructure will not gain the necessary permissions to be developed on site, and will not have the longevity that a site that experiences seasonal inundation, will require.

Viewing the perceived constraints and natural functions of the site as opportunities rather than challenges, frames the proposed recommendations as progressive and holistic. This approach to development has the potential to position the site as pioneering within Northern Ireland. The site has the potential to be an example of best practice to show how flood plains along the Moyola River (and other similar waterways in Northern Ireland) can be restored to more than a series of embankments and pastoral grazing of a habitat that is lacking in species diversity.

It is imperative that future development should not detract from the site; it must be carried out sensitively and underpinned by principles of sustainability. In this respect the future management of the site should adhere to the ethos that nature and recreation are equal in terms of priority at the site, one should not be at the expense of the other.

In broad terms, recommendations for development should address the objectives below –

- Embrace the existing natural functions of the site
- Enhance the future natural functions site
- Create a quality recreational space for the local community

Several NGOs were engaged with as part of the external engagement process of this Masterplan. The Ulster Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust and Conservation Volunteers NI were not in a position to be able to offer resources or advice on one or more of: the design, development or ongoing maintenance of the site.

RSPB NI are the largest nature conservation charity in Northern Ireland and their priorities are focused on the recovery of nature by prioritising species, habitats and sites and setting clear objectives for each. RSPB NI are passionate about working in partnership with a range of landowners, managers and partners to support these priorities. Providing suitable access and education are important elements of their work, which aims to ‘give nature a home’. RSPB NI are currently working in partnership with MUDC on several other recreation and habitat projects just as the recently completed boardwalk at The Strand - Lough Beg, Bulrush site at Newferry and Toners Bog outside Bellaghy.



Figure 15 Boardwalk across wet grassland habitat at The Strand, Lough Beg

Within RSPB NI, an internal department titled ‘Countryside Land Management Services’, is tasked with working with partners to enhance marginalised sites, both in an advisory role and by providing advice and construction-based solutions e.g. habitat design options, provision of specialist machinery suited to working on waterlogged sites etc. They work closely with colleagues in GB to share best practice and expertise regarding habitat creation and management at a nationwide level.

RSPB NI undertook a visit to the lands at Mullagh Road in order to gain an understanding of the site’s potential and what the priorities might be for the site in terms of habitat development.

All recommendations put forward in the Masterplan with regards habitat design, creation and future maintenance, are based on discussion with and advice from RSPB NI staff, namely: Seamus Burns - Area Manager, Gareth Bareham - CLMS Conservation Officer and Mark Smart Senior - Project Manager (Ecology and Land Management (GB)).

All recommendations for the path network, supporting infrastructure, play and signage, are those of ORNI. Car park design and costings have been provided by RPS Consultant Engineers.

6.2 Options

Table 8 below shows the options considered for the lands at Mullagh Road. All options (apart from do nothing) require intervention in the form of hydrological and ecological studies, to inform site design and soft engineering (earthworks) in order to make the space available useable for recreational purposes. Section 7.2 and 7.3 show the detail and differences between partial and full development.

Option	Results
Do nothing	No provision of a biodiversity and recreation resource for the local community. Opportunity missed to deliver on key targets as identified in Section 3.1 and 3.2.
Partial development	Provision of a unique biodiversity and community recreation resource, that partially utilises the potential of the site. Options to develop a full path network, additional play and education facilities, upgrade of linkages to the town and overflow carparking are not explored.
Full development	Provision of a unique biodiversity and community recreation resource, that fully utilises the potential of the site, through a progressive ecosystems-based approach to development. A fully considered biodiversity and recreational resource is developed that includes an accessible path network, suitable play and education facilities, development of linkages to the site, additional car parking infrastructure and a suite of bespoke signage and interpretation.

Table 8 Options for development

Following on from this, key recommendations for the Lands at Mullagh Road are as follows –

6.3 Habitat Creation

Enhancing biodiversity through habitat creation within the site is a key factor in developing the site as a quality green space. This will be achieved by embracing the natural functionality of the site and enhancing it, so the optimum mixture of habitat types can be provided to encourage wetland species to thrive.

All public bodies have a statutory duty ⁹ to protect, maintain, enhance, restore and promote understanding of biodiversity. This is recognised in the MUDC Biodiversity Action Plan which commits Council to the following actions:

⁹ Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland), 2011

- Develop initiatives at a number of sites, to enhance their value for wildlife
- Develop partnerships to assist in the delivery of River Basin Management Plans (e.g. investing in wetlands to help prevent flooding, addressing pressures caused by modifications to natural flow of rivers)
- Support...other organisations within the Mid Ulster area to enhance wetland habitats and species¹⁰

The next steps with regards the existing and potential habitat on site, is to carry out an ecological assessment of the site from which key detailed recommendations on how best to enhance biodiversity can be made. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal will provide a baseline ecological study of the site and assess the site in terms of ecological features present or that could be potentially present. It will then make recommendations for any further surveys required e.g. mammal survey (bats, badgers etc), invertebrates and others. This should be completed in tandem with the hydrological study and flood risk assessment to help understand the natural functions of the site and to put forward appropriate designs accordingly. Until an ecological assessment can be completed, the following general recommendations can be made –

- Habitat enhancement
 - Re-establishment and reprofiling of existing ditches by clearing, reprofiling and expanding existing ditches
 - Enhancement and reprofiling of the Mullagh Burn embankment including the creation of pools and bankside vegetation
 - Enhancement and expansion of wet grassland
- Habitat creation
 - Pools – a series of simple pools from shallow to deeper, (incorporating shelves) along with appropriate planting.
 - Scrapes - shallow ponds of less than 1m depth, with gently sloping edges and bare earth which hold rain or flood water seasonally and which remains damp for much of the year.
 - Wet grassland
 - Traditionally a habitat maintained by grazing but can be maintained by mechanical methods

¹⁰ Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan, 2014-17

- Important for wading birds and invertebrates
- Suitable hydrological conditions required - seasonal
- Reedbed area to buffer WWtW
 - Transition habitat between land and wet habitats – fringe vegetation
 - Can be used for screening and filtration purposes
 - Suitable hydrological conditions required
- Native deciduous woodland areas
- Planting larger trees along the Mullagh Burn boundary to help shield site from A2
- Invasive species removal
- Leaving areas of grass uncut and reducing the frequency of cutting – pathways can be mowed through these to give a manicured effect and temporary signage installed to inform the public.
- Use interpretation to educate users about biodiversity

The images in Figure 16 below show the type of habitats that can be created on site:



Figure 16 Wetland mosaic – pools, scrapes and wet grassland, newly planted woodland and reed bed habitats

6.4 Path network

A quality walk trail network is essential to allow visitors to fully explore a site, to experience nature and engage with carefully considered and designed positive control points. In consideration of this, a concept design for a new sustainable trail network has been recommended as part of the Masterplan. The trail concept will require detailed design once the ecological and hydrological surveys are completed and have informed the habitat creation design stage.

The aims of the trail network are as follows –

- Provide access to the site
- Cater for, and appeal to a range of users and abilities
- Bring users in close proximity with the natural wetland habitat
- Sit sensitively within the landscape
- Address the challenge of providing recreation opportunities within a flood plain

6.4.1 Rationale for Walk Trail Network

The proposed walk trail network (see Section 7.2.) is comprised of a linear trail originating from the proposed trailhead and car park adjacent to the Walled Garden. It then follows the existing Largentogher Walkway to a newly formed link between the walkway and the proposed new pedestrian entrance point at the north of the site. From here a looped trail network provides accessible routes around the boundary of the site as well as via various other trail options through newly created wetland and planted areas or to positive control points¹¹. All trails within the network are classified as Category 1 or 2 multi-use trails. This means that the trails are suitable for users with limited mobility, pedestrians, and children on bikes. The trail network will not be suitable for adult cyclists.

Table 9 shows trail lengths and categories for the proposed trail network. A detailed description of trail categories can be found in Appendix C.

Proposed Trail Network						
	Trail section	Linear or looped	New build or existing	Surface	Category	Length (m)
1	Car park link	Linear	Existing	Bitmac	1	321
2	Largentogher link	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel	1	85
3	Boundary trail	Looped	New build	Compacted gravel raised causeway	1	2028
4	Elevated walkway	Linear	New build	Recycled plastic boardwalk	1 and 2	630
5	Trails to nature viewing areas	Linear	New build	Recycled plastic boardwalk	1 and 2	160
6	Business Park link trail	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel	1	100
7	Other linking trails	Linear	New build	Compacted gravel raised causeway	1 and 2	334
Total						3558

Table 9 Trail lengths and categories

6.4.2 Trail surface

In terms of trail surface, several factors have influenced the recommendations in Table 9.

¹¹ Feature or point of interest present on site

- Bitmac

The Largantogher Walkway is an existing, accessible public footpath in an urban area and as such is surfaced using bitmac. This is a highly durable surface suited to its location, but bitmac is not recommended for the proposed trail network due to its visual impact not being suitable for use in a natural setting and its non-porous surface increasing runoff in an existing flood plain.

- Compacted gravel

This trail surface is recommended for trail development in a natural setting, which is **not** located within the floodplain. An example of this in the recommended path network is in the wooded area linking the site to the Largantogher Walkway. This surface is recommended here due to being more visually suited to its surroundings and not generating additional runoff due to being porous in nature. There is leeway here to have this section surfaced with bitmac for consistency with the surfacing of the Largantogher Walkway, depending on Council’s preference.

- Compacted gravel – raised causeway

A raised causeway trail constructed from compacted gravel, is recommended for the majority of the path network. This trail construction type is suitable for sections of the path network within the flood plain due to it being raised above ground level, the use of rock as anchors on the retaining edges, a geotextile layer to prevent subsidence and the binding surface layer which when combined with rain or flood water, will bind the trail tightly together - providing a robust, accessible and visually acceptable trail.

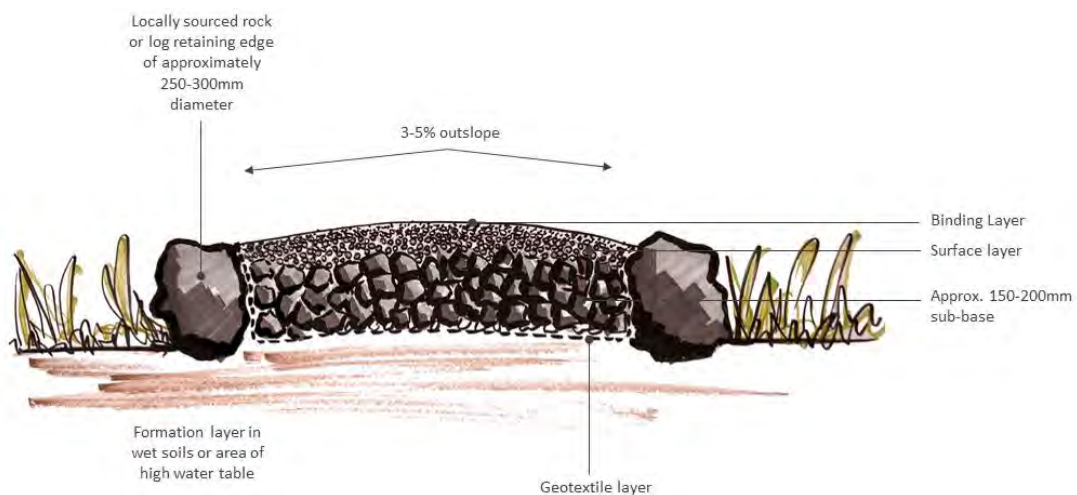




Figure 17 Raised causeway path construction and example

- Recycled plastic boardwalk

Recycled plastic boardwalk trail is recommended for sections of the trail network where the ground surface is likely to be permanently inundated with water. This includes areas crossing naturalised drains or leading to nature interaction points over water such as pond dipping or bird hide locations. Boardwalk is also recommended as the trail construction type for the elevated walkway on the embankment, due to the need for an anchored structure to be placed here as opposed to a gravel path.

Handrails are only required where the boardwalk is likely to be a height off the ground e.g. the elevated walkway.

Recycled plastic boardwalk is recommended as opposed to wooden boardwalk due to the lack of ongoing maintenance required and its longer product lifespan. If wooden boardwalk is visually preferred, recycled plastic can be used for the portion of the structure (piling) that is likely to be permanently submerged in water, with wooden sections being used as the path's surface.



Figure 18 Boardwalk examples

6.5 Play provision

6.5.1 Overview

Natural play areas are designated spaces providing opportunities for children to engage and play creatively in a natural setting. There are two main options to developing such an offering –

1. Formal – designated areas with bespoke play pieces designed to blend with the environment
2. Informal – minimally developed play zone, largely using the natural landscape to provide play opportunities

Option 1 is the approach recommended for the lands at Mullagh Road. This is due to:

- the site's location adjacent to a population centre (Maghera town). Structures and surfacing need to be robust in order to ensure durability and an appropriate level of maintenance in the long term.
- the site formerly being grazing pasture and therefore there is a lack of natural resources present on site to facilitate informal natural play. In order to develop informal play, external material will need to be imported onto the site.

It should be noted that PPS15 states that playgrounds for children are not permitted within a floodplain due to potentially exposing a vulnerable group (children) to flood risk, meaning that any formal play provision needs to be outside the floodplain.

Any play developed should be suited to the scope and scale of the site i.e. a local nature reserve, not a tourist facility.

6.5.2 Benefits

Developing a formal, bespoke natural play area has several advantages -

- Promotion of creativity and imagination
- Provision of a different type of stimulation to that of 'standard' play
- Design of bespoke, site specific play structures which promotes adventure, builds confidence and teaches responsibility
- Allows for themed play structures to be developed, that are designed to reflect the landscape and habitats where they are located thus providing a sense of place and education opportunity
- Allows for the development of play opportunities that are inclusive to all e.g. those with limited mobility or with disabilities, those with sensory issues, a wide range of ages etc.

Developing formal and bespoke natural play areas in different locations around the site will form a play trail which will provide the following benefits:

- Encourage wider exploration of the site
- Facilitate longer stays and repeat visits
- Provide a space for outdoor classroom or forest school type activities

6.5.3 Recommendations

It is recommended that the main natural play area should be located at the north of the site, adjacent to the proposed primary pedestrian entrance. This area is located outside the flood plain. This is beneficial as families will be encouraged to walk to the site along the Largantogher Walkway, rather than having the main play area located beside the car park, as most traditional play parks do. The distance from the car park to the proposed play area is not prohibitive (400m), even to young children or children with limited mobility.

Surfacing of the natural play site is recommended to be bonded rubber mulch. This has a natural look to it so will fit visually within the natural landscape, as well as being durable and accessible to all.

The nature sculptures should be located to lead visitors into and around the site and be accessible off the formal trail network. Examples of formal natural play are shown in Figure 19.



Figure 19 Examples of bespoke formal natural play

6.6 Additional facilities

6.6.1 Nature interaction points

Providing opportunities for visitors to interact with nature, is a key objective of the Masterplan proposal and helps to address many of the aims of the strategic plans and reports referenced in Section 3. As well as the trails themselves, dedicated infrastructure to facilitate interaction with nature is recommended as follows:

- Install boardwalk over areas of wetland habitat, with integrated seating and platforms to allow viewing and pond dipping
- Install a bird hide and shelter offering 360 degree views of the wetland habitat. This could be a multipurpose facility in that it provides opportunities to interact with nature as well as providing a covered outdoor classroom location. Its primary function is a bird hide and should be located centrally within the wetland habitat to allow for optimum interaction with nature.



Figure 20 Pond dipping, bird hide, and board walk platforms

6.6.2 Covered outdoor event space and picnic facilities

Local community engagement identified the need for a small covered outdoor event space. This could be used for shelter by all visitors but would be of particular use for school groups and when hosting small outdoor events / gatherings in bad weather. The location and design of such a facility requires careful consideration to ensure its use is maximised. For the purposes of the Masterplan, it is

recommended that the covered space/ picnic area is located adjacent to the main play area at the primary pedestrian entrance at the north of the site.

The size of the site combined with the considerations outlined in Section 4, means that it is not possible to provide outdoor events space for anything larger than small group activities.



Figure 21 Covered picnic/ outdoor event area examples

6.6.3 Dog exercise area

Across the UK, dog ownership is growing. An estimated 26% of family homes now have a dog and over half of all outdoor visits to green space include a dog¹². Like all visitors, dog owners want to feel welcome and have their expectations met. The following recommendations aim to reduce the negative impacts, promote the benefits and encourage more visits by this user group.

A balanced approach which supports the benefits of access (i.e. increased visitor numbers) whilst mitigating the potential negative impacts is advised. The best way to achieve this is to have a clear dog policy that is openly communicated in pre-visiting information and displayed at access points, the visitor hub, and reinforced at key locations around the site.

The key issues that a dog policy should address is zoning. This identifies where dogs are permitted or restricted and the behaviour that is expected within each area, i.e. on or off lead. For example, dogs should always be kept separate from traffic, livestock and children's play areas.

It should be noted that whilst the needs of dog owners should be considered, the main objective of the proposed development is to enhance the site for biodiversity, specifically for wading and ground nesting birds. It is recommended that detailed consultation with RSPB NI is undertaken in order to

¹² Kennel Club, 2019

ascertain the correct dog policy. Initial discussions with the RSPB NI indicate that dogs should be kept on a lead when on site. With this in mind, this plan recommends the provision of a fully fenced dog exercise area, where dogs can be off the lead. All other locations on site, dogs should be on the lead. This is due to the presence of habitats designed to encourage wading and ground nesting birds.

It is recommended that this message is put across to visitors to the site in a positive, friendly manner and that staff engage with dog owners on the ground to develop a partnership approach.

It is recommended that a strategic approach is taken to locating dog bins. For the same reason, it is common practice at many UK sites to use general refuse bins for all waste, including dog mess.



Figure 22 Approach to dog policy at RSPB sites

6.7 Signage and Interpretation

Signage and interpretation are essential to enhance the visitor experience and effectively manage their safety. It should make visitors feel welcome and provide engaging information to help people connect with and explore the site. Effective signage also manages visitor flow around the site and informs the visitor of any risks they should consider. All signage, information, interpretation and trail waymarking should be presented in a consistent way.

It should be designed, planned and located with the visitor in mind. It should be vibrant, colourful, fresh, modern and engaging.

A Signage and Interpretation Plan contains a clear set of aims and objectives for the development of a holistic visitor experience. It makes recommendations on how the visitor experience could be enhanced through the development of signage and interpretive facilities. A signage or interpretation

strategy then sets out the processes required to achieve the aims and objectives of the Plan through various solutions which are specifically targeted at different audiences.

In consideration of this, it is recommended a Signage and Interpretation Plan is developed which includes:

- a signage strategy
- an interpretation strategy
- brand guidelines
- roll out of a suite of signage across the site
- enforcement of the standards set in the strategies

6.7.1 Signage

Within the Signage Strategy, the following categories of signage should be developed –

- Welcome signage

The function of this is to create a positive first impression for visitors by delivering vibrant and engaging messages and signalling the site's unique selling points and the activities available within. This should be installed at the main entrance, any additional pedestrian entrances and at the trail head.

- Car park signage and orientation panels

This outlines any parking requirements and provides useful orientation information.

- Trailhead Information Panel

This contains a detailed trail map and descriptions, trail grade specifications and a code of conduct. This should also include an updateable information panel to provide accurate information about any current trail closures, trail conditions, events, etc.

- Waymarkers

Comprised of waymarker posts and discs. Effective waymarking enables visitors to navigate their way around a formal trail system without the use of a map. The waymarker discs should use universally recognisable iconography to depict navigation and visitor safety messages.

- Prohibitory Signage

Designed to discourage behaviour likely to incur or cause danger.

- Warning/hazard sign

Warning visitors of a particular hazard, e.g. deep water

- Exit Signage

Located at the exit of a site thanking visitors for visiting and encouraging them to attend again in the future. The name of the area can also be added along with branding.

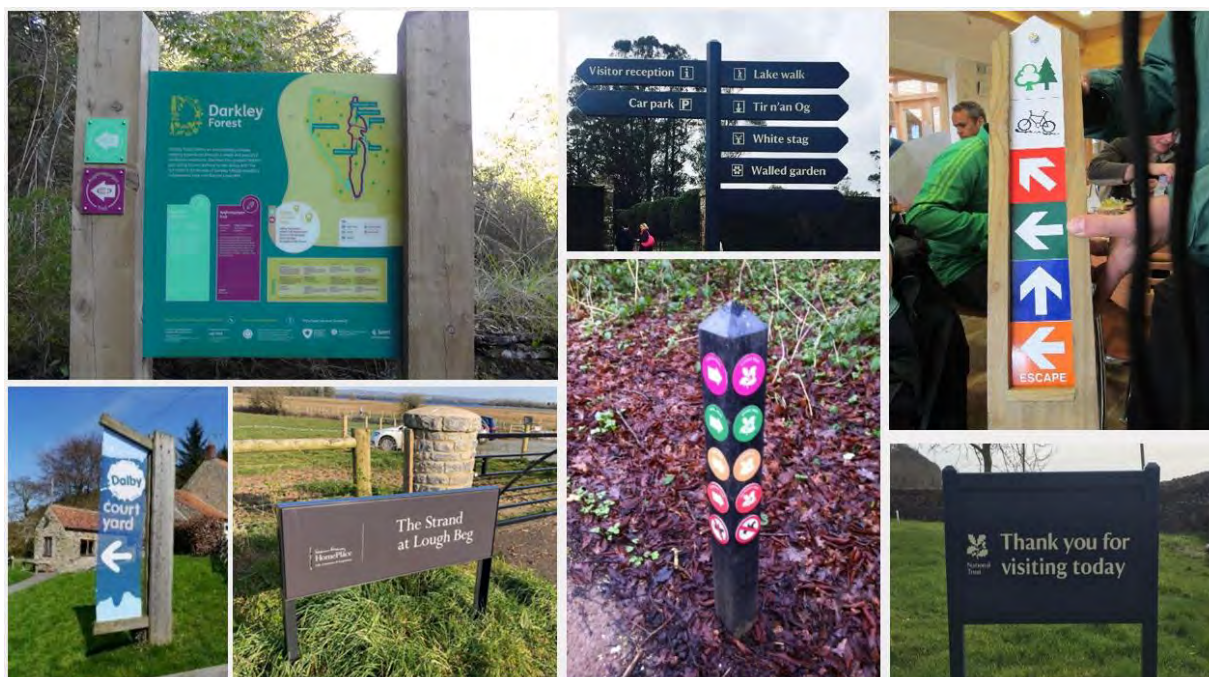


Figure 23 A selection of best practice signage examples

6.7.2 Interpretation

Interpretation is a communication process that helps people make sense of and understand more about a place. It can –

- Bring meaning to the cultural or environmental resource, enhancing visitor appreciation and promoting better understanding. As a result, visitors are more likely to care for what they identify as a precious resource.
- Enhance the visitor experience, resulting in longer stays and repeat visits.
- Enable communities to better understand their heritage, and to express their own ideas and feelings about their local area.

Ideas about what is good practice in interpretation have moved on significantly in recent years to encompass a much wider approach to interpretation than installing lectern style panels with text and images. Figure 24 shows some examples of appropriate interpretation.



Figure 24 Examples of integrated interpretation

6.8 Parking

Current car parking provision adjacent to the Walled Garden, consists of 8 unmarked spaces and a gravel surface – this requires upgrading and expansion to service the proposed park. It is recommended that additional car parking is provided to service the site. Figure 25 shows the design completed by RPS Group for upgraded and additional car parking. This proposal is on land owned by MUDC and includes 18 dedicated parking spaces, of which 3 are disabled spaces. It is recommended that the trail head is situated at this location.

This proposal is being completed in tandem with proposed improvements to the public realm in Maghera and includes the development of a small area of public space with an art installation on Church Street, opening up an area of land that has not previously been accessible to the public.

The car park proposal also includes an overflow parking area (30 no. spaces) to the west of the current car park. It is understood the development of this area is dependent on permission for access being granted by a private landowner.



Figure 25 Proposed design of upgraded and additional car parking

6.9 Management and maintenance

In terms of development and management of the site, it should be highlighted that the proposed Wetland Park will require specific expertise and resources, that may not be currently available within the remit of the Council. Examples of this being habitat design, creation and maintenance.

An option that would address this would be for Council to seek a suitably qualified and skilled partner to deliver these elements. An example being the Council entering into a Management Agreement with an appropriate and experienced NGO, in order to allow the necessary expertise to be brought on board within the management team for the site. It is recommended that this partnership is formed from the outset in order to guide the development of, and decisions regarding the key elements of habitat creation and future management.

Council would retain ownership of the site as well as responsibility for visitor functions and infrastructure such as car parking, path network, play facilities and liability for the site, while the NGO would be a key partner advising on the development of the site in terms of habitats and ecology. The NGO would also undertake responsibility for the maintenance of the site in terms of the habitats present and created, by writing a Habitat Action Plan (HAP). Following this, they would be responsible

for the actions that the HAP recommends e.g. habitat creation and enhancement, vegetation maintenance, monitoring of aims of the HAP etc. This could also involve delivering community events such as ‘walk and talks’ etc.

There are options for either body to accept additional or fewer elements of the ongoing management and maintenance of the site, as required or preferred by either party. The key message is that **the specialist requirements of the habitats created on site will require:**

- **additional expertise within the site management team,**
- **a dedicated and targeted action plan (HAP),**
- **skilled staff and specialised machinery required to deliver actions on an ongoing and annual basis.**

The HAP should be completed by the NGO in Year 1 of development, following on from the completion of the hydrological and ecological surveys. The contents of the HAP will in turn, influence other elements of development such as site and trail design (e.g. inclusion of appropriate access points and access pathways).

The revenue costs associated with these management and maintenance recommendations require consideration. The requirements and responsibilities for the annual management and maintenance of the site are summarised in Table 11.

6.10 Other Considerations

6.10.1 Linkages

The development of a new linkage and enhancement of existing linkages are included in the Masterplan.

The creation of a pedestrian linkage from the Largantogher Walkway to the northern corner of the site, is essential to ensure that pedestrian access to a suitable car parking facility can be achieved. The proposed linkage includes two options, both of which achieve the same end goal of linking the site to the walkway. One option would require the development of a path 72m in length, the other option would require the development of a path 32m in length. See Section 7.2 for detail.

Both options require the use of privately owned land in order to be delivered. Permission to access the private land has not yet been secured and this should be addressed as a priority, in order to allow other recommendations from the Masterplan to be taken forward.

Existing linkages that require enhancement are as follows:

- Babies Walk

- A privately owned agricultural laneway used informally for walking and making a looped walk around Maghera town.
- A Permissive Path Agreement could be set up between the Council and the landowner to formally permit walking here, thus strengthening and formalising an off-road linkage to the western side of Maghera.
- It is recommended the surface of the laneway is upgraded as part of the Masterplan, allowing for sustainable use for agricultural purposes and pedestrians.
- This linkage would provide opportunity for the members of Watty Grahams GAC to link to the Wetland Park, a desire of the club identified during consultation.
- Tobermore Road
 - Following the recommendations for Babies Walk, it is recommended that an existing pedestrian traffic refuge located 80m north of the entrance to the Largantogher Walkway, is relocated adjacent to the Largantogher Walkway (Figure 26). This means that it will serve visitors coming from the north (Maghera town) and visitors from the south (via Babies Walk) to permit safe crossing of the Tobermore Road to access the walkway.
 - This refuge can also be used to service pedestrian access to the proposed Business Park, perimeter trail within the Business Park and the potential link between the Business Park and the Wetland Park, as can be seen in Section 7.2.
- Mullagh Road
 - A bitmac pedestrian footpath is present along the western side of the Mullagh Road. It links the agricultural access point to the site on the Mullagh Road to Church Street.
 - From the 30mph signs south to the access point, lack of footfall has meant that the footpath has narrowed to single file width (Figure 26).
 - It is recommended that the footpath is upgraded to ensure that the surface and the width of the path are suitable to be used as a linkage to the proposed secondary pedestrian access point to the site from the Mullagh Road.



Figure 26 Traffic refuge on Tobermore Road, and narrow footpath on Mullagh Road

6.10.2 Visitor counters

Locating visitor counters at strategic locations around the site is essential to ensure a more accurate indication of numbers accessing the park and using particular facilities. Data captured by counters provides an insight to the level of demand for development and can help justify future funding.

6.10.3 Encouraging participation

Council should encourage and support formal and informal participation programmes aligning with its aims and in partnership with programmes being run locally, for example in the Walled Garden or other nature-based community initiatives such as at Carntogher/ Drumnaph. This can be achieved with limited demand on staff resources or can be delivered in partnership with a suitable NGO e.g. RSPB NI.

Some users and activities could include –

- ‘Green prescription’ - GP health referrals, health walks
- Forest school/outdoor classroom
- Buggy Walks
- Couch to 5k
- Horticulture events in tandem with opportunities at the Walled Garden
- Nature walks e.g. dawn chorus, bird identification, bat monitoring activities and events

For Council staff, a simple approach of engaging with user groups, being welcoming and accommodating and promoting the groups’ activities on-site can encourage participation and grow a feeling of community stewardship.

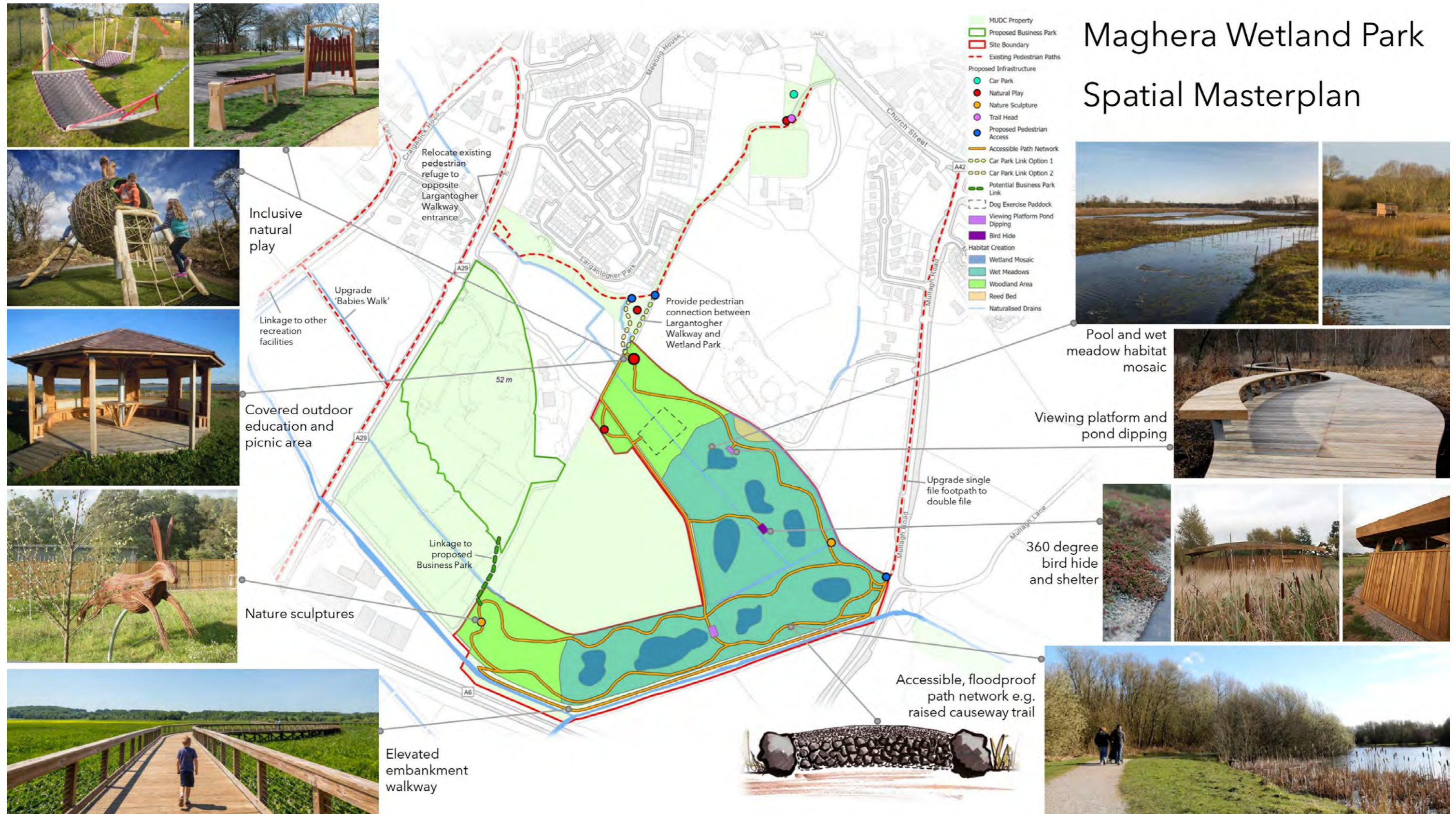
7 Spatial Masterplan

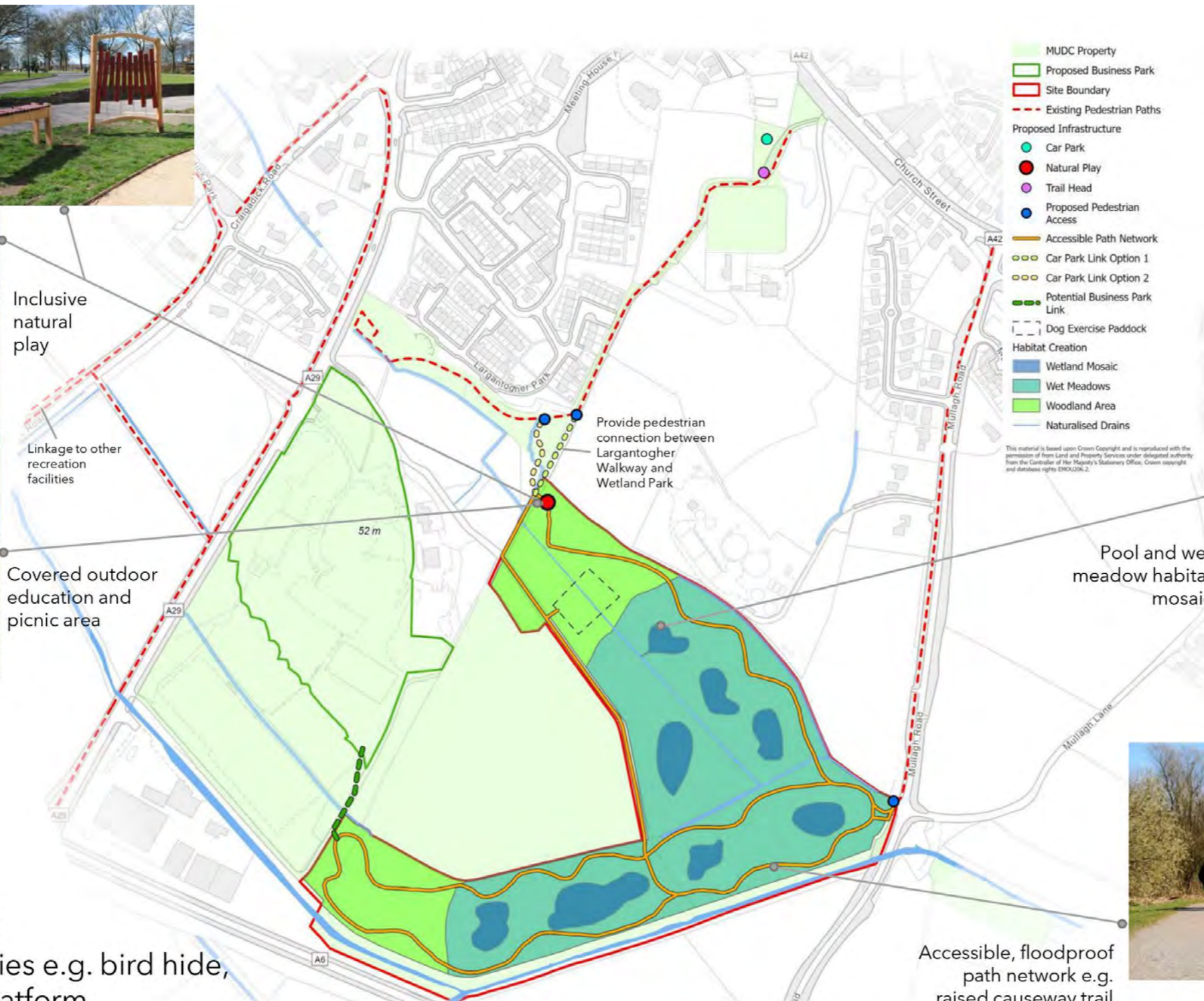
7.1 Context for development of the spatial Masterplan

This Plan sets out the recommended spatial layout of outdoor recreation activities and visitor facilities within the site, taking account the challenges and opportunities highlighted previously within the remit of this Plan.

The Plan is concept only and needs further refinement following completion of recommended studies.

Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan





Maghera Wetland Park Spatial Masterplan (partial development)



Scaled back:

- Natural play trail
- Additional facilities e.g. bird hide, pond dipping platform
- Elevated walkway
- Linkage upgrades
- Overflow car park

8 Costings

8.1 Costs overview

Table 10 includes indicative costs for the development costs in this Masterplan.

Car park design and costing have been supplied by RPS Consultant Engineers.

All costs associated with recreation development, have been informed by ORNI's extensive database of benchmarked costs for similar projects.

All costs associated with habitat creation have been informed by the RSPB and their extensive experience and knowledge of similar projects.

8.2 Development costs

No	Element	Description	Cost (excl. VAT)	Development Options		
				1 Do Nothing	2 Partial Development	3 Full Development
Pre-development						
<i>Consultancy services</i>						
1	Hydrological survey (inc flood risk assessment)	To determine feasibility, final design and costings of hydrological works	£7,000		✓	✓
	Ecological surveys	Phase 1 Habitat, mammals (bats, badgers etc), invertebrates, others	£7,000		✓	✓
	Site design and project engineering plan	Full site design and project planning (to include liaison with relevant statutory bodies, consents)	£10,000		✓	✓
	Trail design	To include detailed trail design prescriptions and planning permission consent	£8,000		✓	✓
	Habitat Management Plan	Plan to manage created habitat over a specified time period	£2,000		✓	✓
	Signage and Interpretation Plan	To include a signage and interpretation strategy considering branding, appropriate themes for the site, consultation and costings for delivery	£7,000			✓
	CPM (6% capital cost)	Manage the project within the constraints of time, budget and quality	See 'Development Options'		£53,670	£71,610
			Subtotal	£0	£87,670	£112,610
Capital Works						
<i>Preliminaries</i>						
1	Preliminaries (up to 15% of capital costs)	Site set up, insurances, mobilisation etc.	See 'Development Options'		£134,174	£179,024
<i>Path Network</i>						
2	Flood proof accessible trail network c. 2.5km	Raised causeway compacted gravel trails, compacted gravel trails, recycled plastic boardwalk	£180,000		✓	✓
	Business Park link trail	Compacted gravel trail	£7,000		✓	✓
	Trail furniture	Benches, bins, gates, pedestrian bridges etc	£10,000		✓	✓
	Embankment raised platform c. 600m	Recycled plastic boardwalk with handrails	£120,000			✓
	Visitor Counter		£2,000		✓	✓
<i>Access</i>						
3	Main car park	Gravel carpark with 18 spaces, including line work, drainage etc	£340,995		✓	✓
	Mullagh Road footpath upgrade c. 260m	Upgrade existing single file bitmac footpath to double file bitmac footpath	£13,000			✓
	Tobermore Road crossing point	Realign existing pedestrian refuge 70m south, to be located adjacent to entrance to Larganess Walkway	£4,000			✓
	Babies Walk upgrade	Upgrade existing surface with compacted gravel trail, suitable for agricultural vehicles and pedestrians	£9,000			✓
<i>Natural Play</i>						
4	Main formal natural play area (up to 0.1ha)	Robust wooden adventure play area to include a variety of options with high play value, to include a covered outdoor classroom/ picnic area. Natural look, wet pour surfacing.	£200,000		✓	✓
	Formal natural play trail	Up to three additional formal natural play locations	£60,000			✓
	Nature sculptures	Up to two nature sculpture locations	£40,000			✓
<i>Habitat Creation</i>						
5	Creation of pools c. 6ha	Based on hydro study - series of simple shallow to deeper, shelving types with appropriate planting. Some suitable for pond dipping/education others purely nature	£36,000		✓	✓

	Creation of hydrological control features e.g. sluices c. 600m	Based on hydro study - re-establishment and re-profiling of existing ditches e.g. clearing, reprofiling edges/expansion etc	£60,000		✓	✓
	Enhancement/re-profiling embankment c. 400m	Enhancement of Mullagh Burn with re-profiling, creation of pools/bankside vegetation etc	£10,000		✓	✓
	Creation of reedbed c. 0.03ha	To screen WWtW	£5,000			✓
	Planting of woodland areas c. 2.5ha	Native woodland creation using tree species suited for wet woodland habitat	£5,000		✓	✓
	Mature trees c.100 no	Additional larger trees along Mullagh Burn southern boundary, along central lane and other site edges as required	£3,000			✓
	Establishment/enhancement of wet meadows c. 5ha	Landscaping and planting for habitat creation and enhancement	£30,000		✓	✓
Additional facilities						
6	Pond dipping platforms x 2		£4,000			✓
	Bird Hide x1	360 degree, covered viewing area	£20,000			✓
	Dog exercise area c. 0.2ha	Securely fenced area for dogs to be off the lead	£3,000		✓	✓
Signage and interpretation						
7	Interpretation	Baseline - Trail head information x1, pedestrian entrances x2, educational panels x3	£9,000		✓	
		Exemplar - suite of bespoke appropriately themed interpretation	£30,000			✓
	Waymarking	Finger post signage at pedestrian entrances x 2, waymarkers posts plus disks x 20	£1,500		✓	✓
Subtotal			£0	£1,028,669	£1,372,519	
Total (Pre-development + Capital)			£0	£1,116,339	£1,485,129	
Contingency (15%)			£0	£167,451	£222,769	
Inflation (8.6%)			£0	£110,406	£146,879	
Total Cost			£0	£1,394,196	£1,854,778	

All costs exclusive of VAT

Please note these are high-level indicative costs to support a masterplan. Further studies will be required to inform detailed cost preparation.

Car park costings have been supplied by RPS Consulting.

All costs associated with recreation development, have been informed by ORNI's extensive database of benchmarked costs from similar projects.

All costs associated with habitat creation have been informed by the RSPB and their extensive experience of similar projects.

Table 10 Costings for partial and full development options

8.3 Revenue costs

Revenue Item	Detail	Resource	Responsibility	Cost (per year)
Site Warden	Duties to include litter picking, general maintenance, vegetation maintenance, other conservation works, community liaison, site inspection and record keeping	2.5 staff days per week	NGO staff	£15,000
Council staff	Duties to include general maintenance, site inspection and record keeping	1 staff day per week	Council	£6,000
Lease for permissive access on private land	Cost of leasing land in private ownership linking Largentogher Walkway to the Wetland Park. Permissive path agreement required, and annual lease cost incurred	N/A	Council	£321.84 ¹³
Habitat Management Plan actions	Annual site and habitat maintenance and enhancement e.g. rotational cutting of wet grassland, rotational clearing of pools and scrapes	Skilled staff plus specialist machinery at time of the as identified by HMP	NGO staff	£20,000
Large scale maintenance	Path and infrastructure upgrade as and when required e.g. path resurfacing, replacement of sections of boardwalk etc	10% of infrastructure capital costs, once every 5 years (post trail development i.e. from Year 3 onwards)	Council	£23,367
Play infrastructure routine and operational inspections	Routine inspections identify any changes since the last routine inspection (last week / yesterday) whilst operational inspections check the working order of the facility at regular intervals throughout the year.	0.5 staff days per month	Council	£960
Play infrastructure annual inspection	This provides an assessment of the overall safety of the facility by an independent inspector	1 day per year	Independent RPII Inspector	£120
			Total	£65,769¹⁴

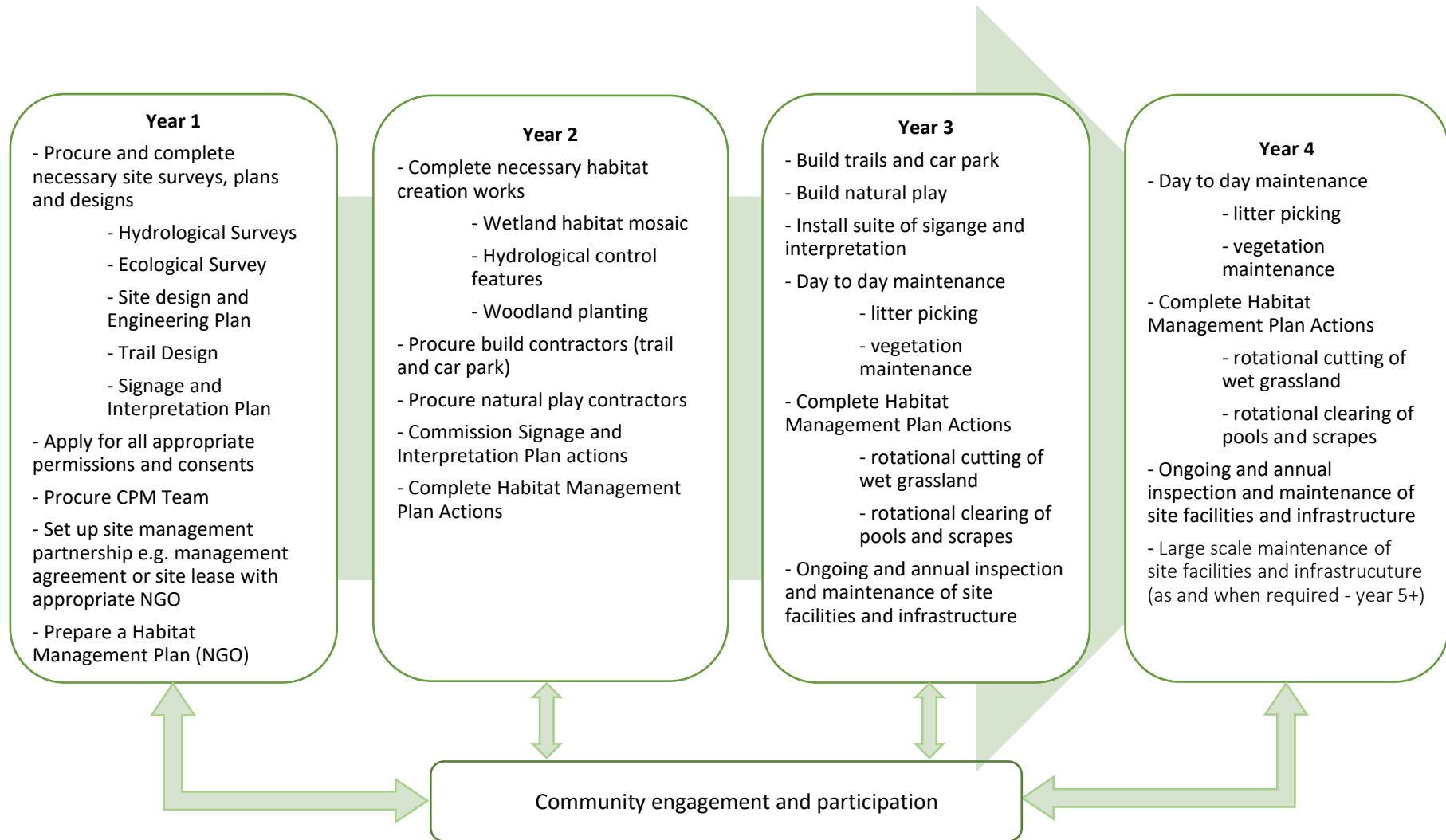
Table 11 Revenue costs associated with Masterplan recommendations

¹³ Cost based on other similar project – true cost unknown until lease agreement is finalised

¹⁴ Revenue costs do not include contingency costs, additional HR costs or inflation

9 Next Steps

9.1 Overview



9.2 Programme for delivery

Category	Item	Pre-development	Development phase	Post-delivery
Habitat creation	Creation of pools	Professional fees for the development of the habitat mosaic Hydrological survey (inc flood risk assessment)	Groundworks and planting where required £36,000	Day to day maintenance Completion of Habitat Management Plan actions
	Establishment and enhancement of wet meadows	Site design and engineering plan Refined cost estimates	Groundworks and planting where required £30,000	Community liaison
	Creation of reedbed	Commissioning of ecological survey(s)	Groundworks and planting where required £5,000	Play infrastructure routine and operational inspections
	Planting of woodland areas	£24,000	Planting £5,000	Play infrastructure annual inspection
	Additional mature trees	Set up site management partnership e.g. management agreement or site lease with appropriate NGO Prepare a Habitat Management Plan	Planting £3,000	See Revenue Costs Table 11
	Enhancement and reprofiling of embankment	£2,000	Groundworks and planting where required £10,000	
	Creation of hydrological control features		Groundworks and planting where required £60,000	
Signage and Interpretation	Signage	Professional fees for a signage and interpretation plan considering branding, appropriate themes for the site, consultation and costings for delivery £7,000	Design, production, and installation £1,500	
	Interpretation		Design, production, and installation £30,000	
Trail Network	Preliminaries	Professional fees for the development of the concept new build trails: CPM procurement Trail design Refined cost estimates Application for relevant consents and permissions £79,610	Site set up, insurances, mobilisation etc. £179,024	
	Trail network		New build trail - Category 1 and 2 Raised causeway gravel trail, compacted gravel trail, recycled plastic boardwalk £180,000	
	Embankment raised platform		New build trail - Category 2	

			Recycled plastic boardwalk with handrails	£120,000	
	Business Park link trail		New build trail - Category 1 and 2 Compacted gravel trail	£7,000	
	Trail Furniture		Production and installation	£10,000	
	Visitor Counter		Production and installation	£2,000	
Access	Main car park	Professional fees included above	Gravel carpark with 18 spaces	£340,995	
	Mullagh Road footpath upgrade		Upgrade bitmac footpath	£13,000	
	Tobermore Road crossing point		Realign existing pedestrian traffic refuge	£4,000	
	Babies Walk upgrade		Upgrade gravel surface	£9,000	
Natural Play	Main formal natural play area		Design, production, and installation	£200,000	
	Formal natural play trail		Design, production, and installation	£60,000	
	Nature Sculptures		Design, production, and installation	£40,000	
Additional facilities	Pond dipping platforms		Design, production, and installation	£4,000	
	Bird hide		Design, production, and installation	£20,000	
	Dog exercise area		Installation	£3,000	
Phased Totals				£112,610	£1,372,519
				Total (Phased total + Contingency (15%) + Inflation (8.6%))	£1,485,129
					£1,854,778

10 Appendices

APPENDIX A - Methodology

This study was completed solely by Outdoor Recreation NI using the methods outlined below:

METHOD	PURPOSE	DETAILS
Desk research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To gather information about contextual background 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development plans Relevant reports and strategies Internet research – case studies of other sites Engagement of conservation NGOs
Public engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey to capture customer profile and usage data One to one – targeted engagement with stakeholders to capture specific information about current provision Online Public Engagement workshop– to inform the local community about the project, capture public opinion and provide an opportunity for the local community to contribute their ideas for development In person Public Engagement event, as above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One to one engagement ongoing throughout project Online public engagement event held 23rd February 2022 In person public engagement event held in Maghera Leisure Centre, 9th March 2022
Site visits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial site visit - accompanied by MUDC staff to introduce the project Follow up site visit Other best practice sites – The Strand, Lough Beg Drumnaph NR 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial site visit completed 17th January 2022 Follow up site visit completed 24th March 2022 Best practice sites visited in March 2022
Initial options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To pull together the findings from site visits, public engagement, desk-based research and ORNI expertise to identify initial options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See details above
Options refinement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present initial options to Council prior to refining final options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentation to MUDC 19th May 2022
GIS mapping	To map all current provision of recreation facilities and future development opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See maps contained in report
Final report	To present all findings and recommendations in one concise report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft report issued to Council June 2022.

APPENDIX B - Consultees

Name	Position	Organisation
Anne Reid	Parks and Countryside Officer	MUDC
Davina McCartney	Regeneration Manager	MUDC
Raymond Lowry	Head of Technical Services	MUDC
Gregor Fulton	Senior Outreach Manager	Woodland Trust
Andrew Croy	Nature Reserves Manager	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Robert Shearman	Senior Development Manager	Conservation Volunteers NI
Seamus Burns	Area Manager West NI	RSPB NI
Gareth Bareham	CLMS Conservation Officer	RSPB NI
Mark Smart	Senior Project Manager (Ecology and Land Management (UK))	RSPB NI
		Maghera Park Action Group
		Maghera Community Forum
		Maghera Heritage Society
		Maghera Development Association
		Watty Graham's GAC
		Maghera Residents Collective
		Largantogher Community Action Group
		Maghera Parish Caring Association / Church of Ireland

APPENDIX C – Maghera Park Action Group – Email Campaign

The following emails were generated by the Maghera Park Action Group Campaign website¹⁵ to register their opposition to the proposals for the development a local community green space within the lands at Mullagh Road instead of the former Maghera High School site.

Please note bold highlights on emails are provided by ORNI to highlight the key points of each.

Email 1: 18/02/2022 – 02/03/2022

61 submissions

While we welcome Council's acknowledgment of the dire need for the provision of open space and development of a public park for Maghera, this consultation **process is deeply flawed in its omission of the Former Maghera High School Site**. The Maghera community have clearly and robustly demonstrated its desire for a public park to be developed within this important public amenity and any consultation on green space provision within the town which does not acknowledge can be seen as nothing more than an attempt to subvert the will of the people of the town and facilitate this site's destruction.

Any master plan to develop these agricultural grasslands must be weighted against the part it plays in **realising the concurrent plan by the same developers (Mid Ulster District Council) to destroy existing mature woodlands and recreational space in the neighbouring Former Maghera High School site**. This site, **used recreationally by the local community for decades, with rich and historically significant biodiversity, must be incorporated into any plan to provide meaningful green space for the people of Maghera** and which is to be safely accessible by foot for a majority of residents.

The former High School site is the ideal location for a safely accessible, community centred recreation and educational shared space for Maghera town and no plan which seeks to sincerely provide this could consider its omission. **For many Maghera residents it is the view that this master plan is simply another in a long line of attempts by Council to push through the industrialisation of existing open and green space**. The lands at Mullagh Road were purchased in desperation by a Council hellbent on going against the wishes of our community and over 3000 objections to their business park plan. At every opportunity our community has made our feelings loud and clear for the development of a public park and retention of our open/green space and mature woodlands at the Former Maghera High School site. **On top of the strength of public feeling on the matter, it simply makes no environmental or economic sense to destroy this vital amenity to attempt to replicate it anew on agricultural lands bereft of biodiversity. It would take many decades to replace the mature trees and habitats of the High School Site.**

The Former Maghera High School site is an important part of our natural heritage and place which holds a deep connection for many in our community. It is in use daily as a de facto public park in lieu of provision by our local Council. This plan, without public assurances on its delivery nor consideration of the High School site within its remit, is simply another process to drive through destruction of the last existing significant area of open space within the town and leave a poor replacement in its wake.

¹⁵ <https://magherapark.good.do/>

As a resident of Maghera, I reject this strategy to build consent for an alternative site in order to steal open space away from the community.

Email 2: 04/03/2022 – 08/03/2022

27 submissions

In response to the consultation on Green Space provision in Maghera, I welcome Mid Ulster District Council's commitment to seeking the community's views in developing natural recreational space in our town. When it comes to developing the Mullagh lands, however, I would raise **objections along economic grounds for the following reasons.**

Questions remain on the spending of public money to purchase flood plain lands without any open discussion through public channels. When the land was presented as purchased in Council, its use was described as mixed, both economic and recreational. **The allocation of land to economic activity, and what form this may take, has not been clarified. Any Design considerations relating to the site are therefore compromised unless we as a community are kept informed of how big or small the Council's plans for economic activity are and the impact from any proposed expansion of the adjacent industrial site idea.**

Funding of the site is likely to require huge financial commitment from the Council. Outdoor Recreation NI have stated that the area will be developed as a 'local' park and not classified as a 'strategic' within the district. This does not sit well with early discussions relating to access, wetland development, inclusivity, educational infrastructure and the assertion that Mullagh will be a 'high quality development'. Despite questions around what budget allocations will be made available remaining unanswered, **early estimates put costs at around a minimum of £2M. Framing the funding as staged and in need of outside funding opportunities shows a lack of firm commitment from the Council.**

The Mullagh lands are being proposed as a way to address a shortfall in Council provision for green space in Maghera. **The costs to develop this as being discussed in the ORNI consultation set against the revenue Council will realise from their sale of the High School site simply do not add up.**

Our town already has an easily accessed recreational site which has been used for generations of families across the whole town. I believe developing this natural wood/parkland would be a better of ratepayers' money.

For these reasons I cannot support the development of the Mullagh lands as Maghera's community recreation area and would ask that our High School grounds are returned to the community for this use instead.

Email 3: 08/03/2022 – 11/03/2022

104 submissions

In response to the consultation on Green Space provision in Maghera, I welcome Mid Ulster District Council's commitment in seeking the community's views on developing natural recreational space in our town. When it comes to this consultation on developing the Mullagh lands, however, **I would raise objections to the site being offered as the most suitable site in public ownership for community**

recreation and educational needs in our town, and in particular, the wetlands proposal as an environmental focus for development.

The Mullagh lands are well known in the area as an effective floodwater basin in times of persistent and prolonged heavy rainfall. Levees currently protect lower levels to enable grazing, with the higher level sited beside the town's sewage treatment plant. **The site is otherwise devoid of any ecological interest or variation. Proposals to utilise the site's majority floodplain status as a potential wetland area will further limit the opportunities to enhance any woodland environment and places a minimally landscaped area, utilising walkways and boardwalks,** with a sewage treatment plant dominating the vista to the North and the fastest road in N Ireland according to PSNI (Roads Policing, 2017), the main A26, to the South.

The vision of a wetlands development on the Glenshane/Mullagh lands will be prohibitively expensive and dependent on a consistently reliable source of water. Benchmarking to the Heaney/Homeplace project neglects the importance of both Lough Beg and the River Bann in maintaining such generous floodplains in that project's wetland ecology. **The increasingly sporadic nature of the flood-drought cycle on the Mullagh grasslands will severely challenge the establishment of any wetland flora/fauna, with insect and animal life limited by the availability of sustainable food and shelter.**

Developing these barren fields at Mullagh to make them suitable for recreation would require an economically unrealistic investment and, critically, time, as identified against the urgent need for green provision in Maghera, that will not be fully realised for several generations at least. As we already have an area of outstanding ecological maturity, with a rich network of complex biodiversity, in the publicly owned lands immediately adjacent to the lands in question, it makes no sense to develop these agricultural fields.

Our children and our children's children will be disadvantaged by the huge environmental loss if this proposal enables the destruction of the woodland legacy that forms our High School site. Any suggestion that like-for-like can be provided on Mullagh is simply providing greenwashing to a proposed ecological and community catastrophe to enable the successful progress of Mid Ulster District Council's industrial planning applications, currently with the Dept. for Infrastructure.

For these reasons I cannot support the development of the Mullagh lands as Maghera's community recreation and education area and would ask that our High School grounds are returned to the community for this use instead.

APPENDIX D - Walk Trail categories and Descriptions

Key trail attributes	Category 1 Multi-Use Trail
Description	<p>Category One Multi Use Trails can be described as 'all ability', that is trails that can be accessed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By any users including those with limited mobility • At all times • With all users able to use the trails at the same time
Width	Minimum 1.8m wide Maximum 2.0m wide
Surface	Sealed surfaces only, must be even and consistent throughout and can include asphalt and compacted gravel ensuring that users of limited mobility can use the trail.
Gradients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum average gradient - not more than 3% • Maximum absolute gradient - not more than 5% for more than 30m
Lines of Sight	Minimum 20m
Trail Features	<p>Flat or level trails with no trail features</p> <p>Any bridges should be not less than 2m wide with handrails throughout</p>
Suitable for	All users



Key trail attributes **Category 2 Multi-Use Trail**

Description	<p>These are trails that are accessible to a wide range of users and abilities but NOT ALL users due to issues relating to trail gradients, trail surfaces and trail features. Users include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedestrians of mixed abilities including young children and some baby buggies • Cyclists of all abilities other than very young children or bikes with stabilizers or wheels less than 400mm • Equestrian users of all abilities • Category Two Multi Use Trails are not suitable for those of limited mobility or with impaired vision
Width	Minimum 1.5m wide Maximum 2.0m wide
Surface	Consistent sealed surfaces and can include asphalt and compacted stone or gravel
Gradients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximum average gradient - not more than 5% • Maximum absolute gradient - not more than 10% for more than 50m
Lines of Sight	Minimum 30m
Trail Features	<p>Small level changes of not more than 60mm deep and not less than 300mm width.</p> <p>Grade reversals of not less than 10m in length and not more than 1m depth. Bridges must be not less than 2m wide and must have handrails throughout</p> <p>Category Two Multi Use Trails should not include steps.</p>
Suitable for	All users

