dlr Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy 2022-31

A Climate for Trees: Human Well-being and Nature

Stakeholder Engagement Report | 26 May 2021
Prepared by: Connect The Dots and Urban Mode Ltd

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Executive Summary

a. Introduction

This section is a summary of the Stakeholder Engagement process held during March and April 2021, to inform the dlr Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy 2022 - 2031.

The report was prepared by the Strategy Project Team: Aidan ffrench project manager, Lorraine O'Hara, A/ Executive Parks/ Landscape Officer and Neil Molloy, Parks Foreman of the dlr Parks and Landscape Services, assisted by Marisa Denker of Connect the Dots and Wessel Badenhorst of Urban Mode Ltd.

The report outlines the approach to the engagement, the process, the results conclusions and recommendations for going forward. The report would not have been possible without the inputs of many local stakeholders, who gave of their time to share their insights, ideas and passion for trees.

b. Rationale for Stakeholder Engagement

The intention of dlr Parks and Landscape Services was to include a Stakeholder Engagement element to the strategy development process, mindful of the importance of stakeholder collaboration for the duration of the Strategy. The aim was to gain insights and perspectives from a range of stakeholders as well as to build trust between the council and stakeholders.

The intended outcomes of the Stakeholder Engagement process were to achieve:

- A broader and more general understanding among stakeholders of the benefits of a comprehensive Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy for the county at various levels and dimensions.

- A broader and general understanding of the responsibilities of stakeholders and citizens to protect and sustain our Urban Green Infrastructure, and in particular our trees and urban forests.

- A commitment from stakeholders to collaborate and to support the development and implementation of the Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy.

- Insight among stakeholders into the role of trees in the ecology of the county.

Insight among stakeholders into the value of trees as carbon sequesters.The process activities were designed to get comprehensive responses from stakeholders using surveys and structured conversations in facilitated Focus Groups. The process was designed to meet four milestones completed in sequential steps, namely:

1. A **Stakeholder Analysis** the project team first analysed the impact and commitment of internal stakeholders in the County Council on the development and implementation of the Strategy. This was followed by identifying and mapping external stakeholders with a responsibility and/ or interest in trees and the urban forestry of the county.

2. A **Stakeholder Survey** was co-designed by the project team to contain questions that would best elicit the opinions and understanding of the stakeholder participants identified in the Stakeholder Analysis.

3. A set of facilitated **Stakeholder Focus Group** workshops with pre-defined stakeholder cohorts as informed by the Stakeholder Analysis, namely:

   → Businesses, Institutional (e.g. schools and Private Landowners (e.g. farmers)

   → Community Groups (e.g. residents associations, Tidy Towns, Men's Sheds)

   → Internal dlr Staff (across Departments and Sections)

   → Youth (dlr Youth Parliament - Comhairle na nÓg and Young People living in Disadvantaged Areas)

4. A **Stakeholder Engagement Report** that provided a description of the process and content of discussions, followed by an analysis of the Focus Group deliberation, finishing with a set of conclusions and recommendations

Between 20-25 people were invited to participate in the Business and Landowners Focus Group, the Community Focus Group and the dlr Internal Focus Group respectively.

Their answers helped formulate the schedule for the Focus Group workshops. Each workshop started with a presentation by a project team member from dlr Parks and Landscape Services outlining the aim and scope of the Strategy. The presentations also covered key information on the value of trees.

The format for the workshops were crafted by Connect the Dots to enable structured, open conversations among the participants. The workshops were run on Zoom and the Mural application (an online whiteboard) was used to create worksheets with Post-it stickers shown on the screen and filled-in as participants shared their ideas.

The process of forming two Youth Focus Groups followed a different methodology.

Due to the Council's code of practice for engaging with young people, it was appropriate and beneficial to collaborate with dlr Community Section as it supports dlr Comhairle na nÓg, in forming the first Group. The second Group was formed through collaborating with Southside Partnership and Crosscare. Both organisations provide youth services to young people living in disadvantaged areas in the county. These organisations invited young people to participate in the online discussions. Crosscare and Southside Partnership also assigned youth workers to facilitate small group breakout sessions during the workshop.

The small group discussions in the Youth Focus Groups covered four areas: Personal Feelings about Trees; Trees in your Neighbourhood; Knowledge and Value of Trees; and Trees and Climate Change.
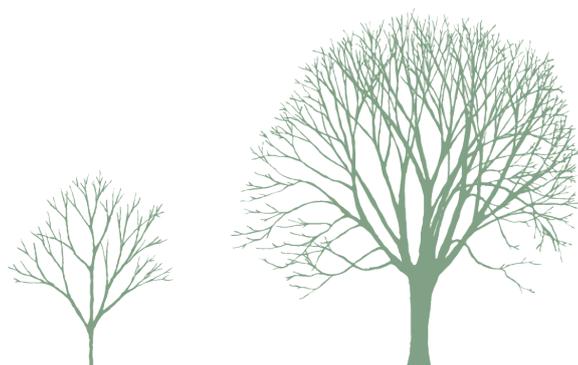
c. Survey Results

Two types of questions were asked, namely rating the importance of statements (on a 10-point scale) and open-ended questions on tree-specific topics. The table below gives a summary of the collective average rating per Focus Group.

Q.	Description	Business	Community	dlr Staff
1	Address the effects of Climate Change	9.14	9.47	8.63
2	Enhance the attractiveness of our Living and Working Environment	9.29	9.73	9.25
3	Enhance the Happiness of people in their environment	8.86	9.33	9.00
4	Increase Commerce and Business activity	7.14	6.93	7.25
5	Improve the Quality of a Place	9.57	9.40	9.13
6	Address the Loss of Habitats for plants and animals	8.71	9.27	8.00
12	Current level of interest among others (other businesses or landowners in the county) to support Tree Initiatives or tree-related projects?	7.71	n/a	n/a

In general, all scores were very high, indicating the high value respondents placed on growing trees in the county. The lowest average across all three groups was in reference to their assessment of the value of trees to increase commerce and business activity. This may be explained by the fact that the economic benefits for planting trees are indirect and are related to a broader agenda of place enhancement.

In particular, the scores show that respondents highly value the enhancement that trees bring to their living environment.

This is slightly more important to them than the value of trees in addressing the effects of Climate Change or in protecting habitat for other species and to increasing Biodiversity.

Valuable suggestions were made in answers to the open questions. These include the following ideas to get citizens and communities participating in tree-related activities:

- Educational programmes on planting the *Right Trees in the Right Places*

- Planting trees in school grounds

- Promoting woodland walks

- Creating sensory areas in parks and on estate greens

- Creating sitting areas under trees

- Planting more native trees and native hedgerows to increase biodiversity

- Creating urban orchards

- Raising community awareness to protect trees

Respondents clearly believed that education and awareness campaigns on the value and importance of trees should be significantly expanded in schools, in communities and on social media.

There was a sense of the need for a holistic approach to our relationship with trees. In particular, it was suggested that education and involvement in tree-related activities take place across all ages, starting with the young.

d. Focus Group Results

In each of the respective workshops, the Focus Groups gave insights into the values, level of awareness and the level of support for actions like tree planting and tree care. The two Youth Focus Groups also gave their particular perspectives on how young people view their own future and the role they think trees could play in this regard.

As to the Strategy's proposed *Values, Ethos and Principles*, it was clear that some participants had emotional connections to trees. The personal stories shared in the Youth Focus Groups in particular were moving when they expressed their fears about the wilful destruction of trees in their neighbourhoods.

Across all Focus Groups there was strong support for incorporating the principle of Stakeholder Collaboration in the Strategy.

Regarding the discussions on *Tree-related Actions* as a focus for the Strategy, there was a commitment especially from community groups to volunteer for tree planting and tree care work.

There was a general sense of urgency for Council to promptly rectify damage to trees.

The unequal tree cover that is prominent in certain areas of social disadvantage in the county was recognised. This acknowledgement was particularly made by the Community Focus Group.

There were varying levels of actual *awareness of the value and role of trees*.

In general, respondents were less aware of the challenges around sustaining healthy tree cover in the county. Many appreciated trees as adornments to the landscape, with limited awareness of the critical role of trees in local ecology. A question arose as to whether the current systems of education and communication are adequate to widely convey the importance of trees for our environment and for our wellbeing.
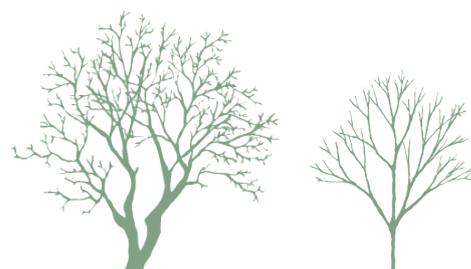
e. Ideas

Some of the ideas which were suggested and advocated
for in the Focus Groups include:

- Install simple tree labels trees so the public can recognise the species and raise their knowledge and awareness.

- Start a "*tree amigos*" project for school children to identify tree issues (e.g. setting up a mission on the Curio app, www.curio-eco.com) in their neighbourhoods and report these issues to the Council.

- Use tree planting to local residents by honouring residents or commemorating events, e.g. the recent initiative in Shankill where the same number of trees planted equaled the human population.

- Build on the recent Council positive initiatives such as its 'wilding' policy ('Slow-to-Mow') and the active mobility projects for roads. This would increase appreciation of the outdoors and the importance of trees.

- Establish an internal protocol for managers of proposed Council projects requiring them to proactively consult with dlr Parks and Landscape Services, on possibilities for incorporating trees. The protocol should include technical matters including Tree Pit Designs and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems.

- Identify a Tree Champion in each Council department who would advocate for trees and liaise with other departments on tree-related issues.

- Work with Smart Dublin to examine new technologies to attain real-time tree data.
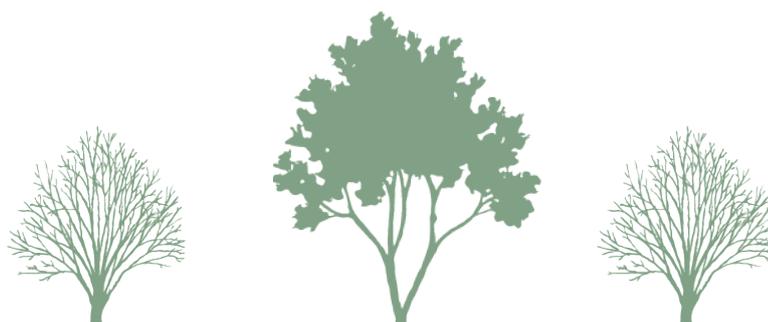
f. Challenges and Concerns

Concerns were raised that the role of trees in mitigating the impacts of Climate Change is not sufficiently emphasised and communicated. This is not just a case of formal education and communication. It should also be addressed through many smaller actions such as adults volunteering to take older people, children and teenagers on tree talk walks through local woodlands.

It should also be addressed through Citizen Science projects in which communities would collaborate with schools and universities.

When prompted, few participants in the Youth Focus Groups indicated their personal involvement in a tree planting event or in tree care.

Discussions in the internal staff Focus Group revealed that there are few formal cross-departmental procedures governing tree-related matters. However, there are several informal collegial relationships through which issues related to tree removal or tree planting can be raised. The conclusion was that this does not provide for a consistent and robust system, and that more formal procedures should be agreed as internal policy.

There is a concern that the natural environment will not recover the loss of trees caused by new developments. New high-density residential developments should provide more space for tree planting, and this should be achieved through the planning system. The Planning Department should require developers to submit Detailed Planting Plans for the consideration of dlr Parks and Landscape Services, so it can agree appropriate tree species, sizes and form. The policy should be that new developments should not merely prevent Net Biodiversity Loss, but should deliver Gains in Biodiversity, including through the planting of more trees.

There is a need to deal constructively with practical concerns such as the impact of trees on light and safety. That will require compromises and alternatives to avoid blanket removal of trees.

The appointment of a Tree Officer and an inter-departmental tree team in the Council was raised in both the Business and Communities Focus Groups.

g. Conclusions

Several participants commented on the need to change perceptions and raise awareness of the value of *Trees as Living Organisms* and of respecting the inter-dependent relationship between humans and trees. This is the essence of a new level of awareness which should be the principal aim of the dlr Trees & Urban Forestry Strategy (2022 – 2031).

In addition to a strong focus on raising levels of awareness, the Strategy would be strengthened by identifying a series of collaborative actions between the Council and partner organisations. Such actions lie in the areas of Communication, Education, Community Participation and Tree Care.

Leadership and co-ordination will be the *'secret sauce'* for a successful Strategy. To achieve success, it is imperative that the Council allocate adequate resources – as a matter of urgency – including the recruitment of a Tree Officer to drive the implementation of the Strategy.

A vision for expanding the urban tree canopy was likened by one participant to "*cathedral thinking",* i.e. inspiring people to plant and protect our trees even if they might never experience their immediate full value, since trees take a long time to reach maturity. This asks us to take a leap of faith and to offer trees as gifts to future generations.

h. Recommendations

- Address the findings from the report comprehensively in the Draft Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy (2022 – 2031).

- Build on the collaborative dynamic initiated in the Stakeholder Engagement process by strengthening relationships with the participants and participating organisations, with a view to 'on-the-ground' collaboration during the lifetime of the Strategy.

- Sustain the momentum created in the Stakeholder Engagement process by giving feedback to participants and by initiating joint pilot actions as soon as is feasible.

Introduction

The following report reflects the insights gathered from a stakeholder engagement process held during the months of March to April 2021 to inform the upcoming Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy 2022 - 2031. The engagement process was delivered by Marisa Denker of Connect the Dots and Wessel Badenhorst of Urban Mode Ltd - in partnership with dlr Parks and Landscape Services.

This report outlines the approach to the engagement, the process, the results, and observations and recommendations for going forward. The insights shared here will be used to inform and guide the development of the Strategy.

The report would not have been possible if participants from many local stakeholders in the County did not give their time to share their thoughts and passions.

We, the dlr Trees Strategy Project Team consisting of Aidan ffrench project manager, Lorraine O'Hara, A/Executive Parks/Landscape Officer and Neil Molloy, Parks Foreman of the dlr Parks and Landscape Services, assisted by Marisa Denker of Connect the Dots Ltd and Wessel Badenhorst of Urban Mode Ltd., would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the Focus Group participants. Their inspiration and insights will help in preparing a strategy worthy of the county's beautiful landscapes.

We would also like to acknowledge the support to conceptualise and organise the Focus Groups given by Sandra Kelly and Kevin Reid of dlr Community Section; Simone Sav of dlr Public Participation Network; Cormac Shaw, Barry Dempsey and Natalie Donegan of Southside Partnership; and Enda O'Dwyer, Rachel Reid, Amanda Mahon and Thomas Reck of Crosscare.

The report is divided into five parts namely Part I: The Approach, Part II: The Process, Part III: The Survey, Part IV: The Focus Groups – Workshop Outcomes, and Part V: Conclusions and Recommendations. The Appendices include detailed information on Participating Organisations, Survey Report, Workshop Agendas, Worksheet Format and Completed Worksheets.

Part I. The Approach

The new dlr Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy, 'A Climate for Trees: Human Well-being and Nature', will be based on a simple, practical philosophy: People need Trees and Trees need People, especially in urban areas. While the Council will lead the Strategy, it wants to encourage a shared-responsibility for the care of trees, among individuals and communities across the county. That requires a spirit of cooperation, capacity-building and collaboration.

In light of this emphasis on collaboration, dlr Parks and Landscape Services wanted to connect with stakeholders at an early stage in the preparation of the Strategy. This approach is in line with best international practice that highlights the importance of early inclusion of stakeholders in key decision-making processes. The benefits of such inclusion include, but are not limited to:

- More robust strategy informed by insights of local experts (stakeholders)

- Increased trust between Council and local stakeholders

- Strong sense of buy-in by considering stakeholder perspectives to build into the plan

- Improved collaboration for implementation stage

The process activities were designed to get comprehensive responses from stakeholders using surveys and structured conversations in facilitated Focus Groups. Such a process has often been used for a variety of public sector clients in Ireland and the USA, by international stakeholder/community engagement firm Connect the Dots. The firm was one of the two consultant teams engaged by the Council for this stage of the project.
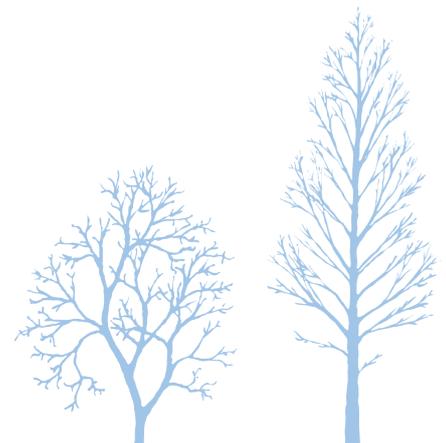
This process is in line with 'Involve' and 'Collaborate' in the IAP2s Public Participation Spectrum. This Spectrum is internationally recognised as a backbone to design and evaluate Public Participation Processes.

IAP2'S PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

iap2 international association for public participation

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION →

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

It is important to emphasise that in this process Stakeholder Engagement will not be a once-off exercise. Rather, it is intended to be the start of an ongoing engagement with communities and key stakeholders continuing for the duration of the Strategy.

Part II. The Process

The Stakeholder Engagement process included the following phases:

1. **Stakeholder Analysis**: An online workshop with the Trees Strategy project team to conduct an analysis of the impact and commitment of the internal stakeholders in dlr County Council on development and implementation of the strategy; as well as the identification of external stakeholders with a responsibility and/or interest in sustainable Green Infrastructure; and the mapping of external stakeholders who benefit from trees and the urban forestry in the county.

2. **Stakeholder Survey**: A co-designed survey to solicit the opinions and understanding of participants as identified in the Stakeholder Analysis, disseminated and processed prior to the commencement of the Focus Groups.

3. **Stakeholder Focus Groups:** A set of five online (Zoom) discussions with stakeholder cohorts pre-defined and informed by the Stakeholder Analysis.

4. **Stakeholder Engagement Report**: A description of the process and content of discussions, followed by an analysis of the Focus Group deliberation, finishing with a set of conclusions and recommendations.

The intended outcomes of the Stakeholder Engagement process were to achieve:

- A broader and more general understanding among stakeholders of the benefits of a comprehensive Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy for the county at various levels and dimensions.

- A broader and general understanding of the responsibilities of stakeholders and citizens to protect and sustain our Urban Green Infrastructure, and in particular our trees and urban forests.

- A commitment from stakeholders to collaborate and to support the development and implementation of the Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy.

- Insight among stakeholders into the role of trees in the ecology of the county.

- Insight among stakeholders into the value of trees as carbon sequesters.

Step 1: Stakeholder Analysis (Mapping and Selection)

Approach

Stakeholder engagement processes are focused not only on the end-product but equally on the process and its impacts. Authentically engaging and enabling stakeholders to inform the Strategy not only helps to create a more robust strategy, it can also help to shape a coalition of supporters and ambassadors to carry the Strategy through. Giving stakeholders the opportunity to participate establishes a sense of buy-in that is critical to the successful delivery of a strategy. That buy-in is invaluable as the Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy will require robust collaboration between stakeholders and the Council, across a range of sectors.

Stakeholder Categories

Mindful of this theory and its potential benefits, the following key stakeholder categories were identified as follows:

- Businesses, Institutional (e.g. schools)and Private Landowners (e.g. farmers)

- Community Groups (e.g. residents' associations, Tidy Towns, Men's Sheds)

- Internal dlr Staff (across Departments and Sections)

- Youth (dlr Youth Parliament - Comhairle na nÓg; Young People living in Disadvantaged Areas)

Having agreed these categories, the team then identified prospective representatives in each category, who could be invited to participate in five Focus Groups representing the stakeholder categories. First, a Stakeholder Mapping exercise was undertaken to identify a wide pool of potential invitees. Then, a Stakeholder Analysis was completed using a variety of tools to determine the best-fit set of stakeholders to participate in the Focus Group step.

Finally, between 20-25 people were selected per Focus Group to participate in the Business and Landowners, Community and dlr staff Focus Groups. The network organiser of the dlr Public Participation Network (PPN) gave invaluable assistance to get invitations to the targeted Community Organisations.

Youth

The process of forming two Youth Focus Groups followed a different methodology. Due to the Council's code of practice for engaging with young people, it was appropriate and beneficial to collaborate with the Council's Community Section as it supports the dlr Comhairle na nÓg (Youth Parliament), as well as with Southside Partnership and Crosscare who provide youth services to young people living in disadvantaged areas in the county.

[*See Appendix A* for List of Participating Organisations in Focus Groups]

Step 2: Stakeholder Survey (Distribution and Development)

The next step in the process was undertaking the Stakeholder Survey. Core questions were developed and an online survey was sent to Focus Groups' invitees as part of the invitation to them to participate. The purpose of the survey was to gather initial insights from each stakeholder and to develop a baseline understanding of their perceptions and experiences of trees and urban forests. The survey findings shaped the content of the Focus Groups. And the findings were analysed to uncover further areas of inquiry that could be explored in-depth during the Group workshops.

The Survey Questions covered the following topics:

- Perceptions of the value and benefits of trees

- Areas where tree cover could be increased

- Perception of correlation between lack of tree cover and areas of socio-economic deprivation

- Integration of trees in stakeholders' work

- Level of interest amongst Stakeholder Group in supporting tree-related initiatives

- Initial ideas or suggestions for ensuring trees/tree cover are maintained, valued, and increased

[See *Appendix B: Survey Report* (incl. survey questions)]

Step 3: Stakeholder Focus Groups (Design and Delivery)

The next step of the process was to conduct focus group discussions. The purpose was to build on the Survey Results and to gather in-depth insights from stakeholders, leaders, and representatives across a range of perspectives.

Five Focus Groups were convened namely one each for Businesses and Landowners, Community Groups and Internal dlr Staff, while two were run for young people namely Youth Group 1 (Comhairle na nÓg) and Youth Group 2 (Crosscare and Southside Partnership).

Below is an overview of their design and delivery.

Structure

Between 20 to 25 people were invited to participate in each Group. Each workshop started with a short presentation by dlr Parks and Landscape Services about the project and its context. This was followed by the core of the workshop in the form of break-out rooms led by Wessel Badenhorst and Marisa Denker. Notetakers were present in each of the breakout rooms to ensure the participants' insights were captured.
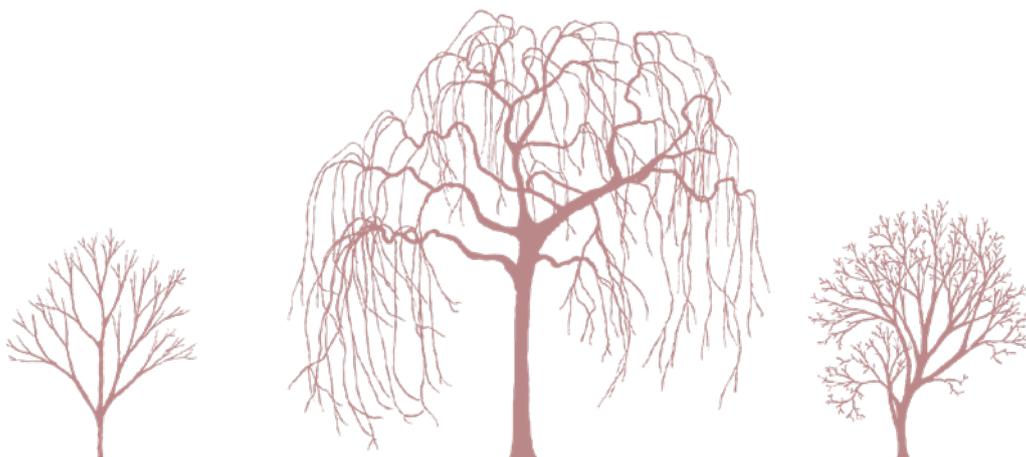
Design

The workshops were crafted by Connect the Dots to enable structured, open conversation across the stakeholders involved. The workshops were run on Zoom and in all workshops (except the Youth sessions), the application Mural (an online whiteboard) was used to create worksheets with Post-its stickers The stickers were shown on the screen and were filled-in as participants shared their ideas. The purpose of Mural was to create a more engaging workshop environment and to facilitate participants in building on each other's ideas.

[See *Appendix B:* Worksheets Template used]

Content

The Focus Group workshops covered a variety of topics to help inform the Strategy and its implementation. The results of the survey helped to shape the topics and enabled the group to hone in deeper on key insights and ideas uncovered in the survey. Topics included:

- The value of trees.

- Perceptions around trees / urban forests.

- The value and potential impact of a Trees Strategy.

- Possible weaknesses and barriers, but also strengths and opportunities to improve and increase tree cover in the county.

- Practical ideas to increase awareness of the importance of trees and of involving other stakeholders to improve the tree cover.

- Collaborative opportunities to implement the Strategy.

Part III. Survey

Rationale for Survey

The survey was designed to gauge the attitude and ideas of respondents and to help with the preparation for their participation in the Focus Group workshops. The questions used in the workshops were formulated from the analysis of the responses received at the preparation (Step 1). An analysis of the survey results also has value in its own right and is published as such in this report.

Analysis of Survey Results

Below is the overview of findings from the survey that was sent to Focus Group invitees [see *Appendix A* for full report] The following table compares the average ratings per question across all three sets of stakeholder category. Ratings indicate the degree of positive response to each question, on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most positive.

	Stakeholder Engagement Survey – Average Ratings (out of 10)			
Question No.	**Description**	**Business Group**	**Community Group**	**dlr Staff Group**
1	Address the effects of Climate Change	9.14	9.47	8.63
2	Enhance the attractiveness of our Living and Working Environment	9.29	9.73	9.25
3	Enhance the Happiness of people in their environment	8.86	9.33	9.00
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5	Improve the Quality of a Place	9.57	9.40	9.13
6	Address the Loss of Habitats for plants and animals	8.71	9.27	8.00
12	Current level of interest among others such as yourself (other businesses or landowners in the county, respectively) to Support Tree Initiatives or tree-related projects?	7.71	n/a	n/a

In general, all scores (above) were very high thus indicating the high value respondents placed on growing trees in the county.

The lowest average across all three groups was regarding their assessment of the value of trees to increase commerce and business activity. This could be the case because the economic benefits for planting trees are indirect and related to a broader agenda of place enhancement, whereas the other questions were framed in a direct cause-and-effect context.

The rating scores particularly show that respondents highly value the enhancement that trees bring to their living environment.

This is slightly more important to them than the value of trees to address the effects of Climate Change or to protect habitat for other species and increase Biodiversity.

The responses to **Question 7 in the Survey (What other benefits or values of trees are we missing?)** identified the following other elements which should be included in a perspective on the value of trees in the Strategy namely:

- Increasing biodiversity and protecting habitat for other species

- Providing shelter for humans (e.g. shade and protection against weather)

- Creating soil stabilisation

- Contributing to food production

- Important for child development

- Increasing property values
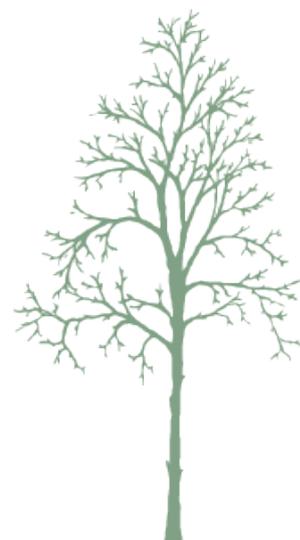
The responses to **Questions 8 and 9 (Where should tree cover be increased and areas where expanding tree cover can address inequalities?**) identified a range of specific places in the county which participants feel can benefit from more tree planting. In general, areas with high density housing that are not close to parks as well as areas with public housing were identified as a priority. It was recommended to increase tree planting in the countryside, parks, new housing developments, roadsides with wide verges and edges of playing fields. Specific areas identified include:

- Dún Laoghaire town centre

- Dún Laoghaire seafront (Newtownsmith to Sandycove)

- Moreen/Blackthorn, Sandyford, especially beside the football field

- Clarinda Park, Dún Laoghaire

- Salthill-Seapoint Gardens (between park path and roadside railings

- Green space to back of the West Pier, Dún Laoghaire

- Soldiers and Sailors Field, Monkstown

- Kilbogget Park

- Sandyford Business District including Sandyford Business Park, Central Park, Leopardstown Road

- Dundrum Village

- The green area opposite Kilcross, Sandyford Road

- Hillview, Ballinteer; area from Dundrum to Marlay Park and near the Ballinteer Swimming Pool

- Ballybrack

- Monkstown Farm

- Nutgrove Avenue, Rathfarnham
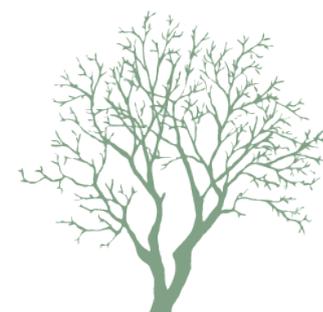
The responses to **Question 10 (asked participants to describe their work related to trees)** showed a rich level of experiences with trees in respondents' the work and projects. These include the work of many community groups such as Tidy Town groups, estate management volunteer groups and Residents' Associations. Work includes tree planting; re-planting and treatment of trees where they have been damaged or vandalised; clean-ups of damaged trees after bad storms; and maintaining trees where there could be light or path issues.

Furthermore, read together with the responses to **Question 12 (ideas to get citizens and communities involved in supporting work around trees**), there were a number of suggestions made which could inspire more community involvement and better outcomes for the quality of tree cover in the county. These include:

- Planting native hedgerow trees where appropriate

- Educational programmes on planting the Right Trees in the Right Places

- Planting trees in school grounds

- Promoting woodland walks

- Creating sensory areas in parklands and on estate greens

- Creating sitting areas under trees

- Planting more native trees and increasing biodiversity

- Creating urban orchards

- Raising community awareness to protect trees

The answers to **Question 13 were in response to prompts to 'think forward' and suggest ideas to be incorporated into the Tree Strategy**. A major response was the need to introduce and expand local collaborative and proactive Tree Maintenance Plans. These would cover a range of activities in a neighbourhood including re-planting, pruning, removal of dead branches, tree replacement, preserving existing trees and watering.

In addition, it was clear to respondents that **education and awareness campaigns on the value and importance of trees** should be significantly expanded in schools, in communities and on social media. In that context, there was a sense of the need for a holistic approach to our relationship with trees. In particular, it was suggested that education and involvement in tree-related activities take place across all ages, starting with the young. For example, young children should be taught how to grow trees from seed and to nurture and watch trees grow. This would initiate and strengthen their relationship with Nature and the local environment.

Also, a need was identified to place more requirements on developers to plant trees, as well as to include good tree selection and to install bio-retention pits for better drainage.

Finally, a far-reaching vision, was proposed, that could guide our approach to trees in the county. Adopting the vision – known as *'cathedral thinking'* – would mean that people who plant and protect our trees might never see or experience their full benefit to our environment (given the time it takes to reach maturity). Nevertheless, those people's actions represent a leap of faith and a gift to future generations.

[See https://cathedralthinking.com/thinkers-cathedral-thinking]

Part IV. Focus Groups: Workshop Outcomes

Overview

During each of their respective workshops, the Focus Groups gave insights into the values, level of awareness and the level of support for actions like tree planting and tree care. The two Youth Focus Groups also gave their particular perspectives on how young people view their own future and the role they think trees could play in this regard.

Regarding the Strategy's proposed Values, Ethos and Principles, it was clear that some participants had emotional connections to trees. Some of their personal stories were moving and also a little disconcerting as to their fears for the willful destruction of trees in their neighbourhoods.

There was strong support for the principles of the Collaboration between Stakeholders.

There was recognition of the issue of unequal tree cover in certain areas of social disadvantage in the county. This was acknowledged particularly by participants in the Community Focus Group.

Several participants commented on the need to change perceptions and raise awareness of the value of *Trees as Living Organisms* and of the interdependent relationship between humans and trees.

There were varying levels of actual awareness of the value and role of trees. Respondents had low levels of awareness of the challenges around sustaining healthy tree cover in the county. M many perceived trees as adornments to the landscape, rather than as critical to local ecology. Also, a question arose as to if the adequacy of current systems of education and communication about the importance of trees for our environment and for our wellbeing.

Regarding the inputs on Tree-related Actions as a focus for the Strategy, there was a commitment especially from community groups to play a role as volunteers in tree planting and tree caring. It was also evident that there seems to be a willingness for collaboration on actions among different groups and institutions taking joint responsibility for a healthy growing tree cover in the County. There was a general sense of urgency for the immediate rectification by the Council of damage to trees.

Selected comments from Focus Groups

Inputs on Draft Strategy's Values, Ethos and Principles

The following comments give an indication of the **attachment to trees** experienced by participants:

> " There is an oak tree on the green in an estate in Ballybrack. It's outside Emma's Nanny's house and generations of her family have played here, so she likes that. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> Sam planted a tree accidently (planted conkers and didn't know it would grow into a tree), but then it grew so they kept it in a pot until it got too big. Then they brought it to the mountains and planted it there. It was a chestnut called Chester. Recently it was cut down. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> We like pretty trees like Pink Maple and Cherry Blossom. (Youth Focus Group 1)
>
> Parks with trees give us a break from cars and noise. (Youth Focus Group 1)

The following comments give an indication of **the perceived value of trees**:

> " Trees are pretty, calming, have nice colours and nice branches to hang swings and hammocks from. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> It is through collaboration that we will achieve tree optimisation and tree equality in our county. (Business Focus Group)
>
> The equality of tree cover in the county - I do a lot of walking and miss trees in the business parks. (Business Focus Group)
>
> On the IMI lands we prioritised the diversity of our trees and good tree maintenance which also included safety given that our grounds are not fenced in. (Business Focus Group)

The value of trees is multi-faceted. For example the added value of trees in planter boxes on the recently pedestrianised parts of the streets increased footfall in Blackrock. (Community Focus Group)

The outcome of sufficient trees and other greenery is a softening of urban areas, including providing cover and shade. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

Trees are an important support system for other species such as birds, bats and insects. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of **the importance of good quality and maintenance** of trees:

"
Well managed parks such as Cabinteely are good for children where they can safely climb in trees. (Community Focus Group)

Masterplans for Regional Parks are working well to give us high level insight where we need to plant trees. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

How do we incentivise developers to retain trees, especially boundary trees and hedgerows? (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of how **Climate Change** is perceived to impact on our future:

"
Some of us think we should not have children due to our thoughts of what the world will be like with Climate Change. (Youth Focus Group 2)

We should walk instead of driving. (Youth Focus Group 2)

It will affect farmers and their crops and everyone who needs food. (Youth Focus Group 1)

The role of trees to minimise the heat island effects in urban areas should be better understood given the impacts of global warming. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of **the low esteem given to trees**:

> " Many schools are preoccupied with paying for other things than their own environment so they only keep up with cutting the grass.(Business Focus Group)
>
> Trees are important and people need to learn not to mistreat them and should start to care about them. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> Trees can't fight back if we attack trees. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> Five years ago we would just cut a tree down if it presented an issue to us, because the problem is then gone. Today we are much more aware of them as an asset. (dlr Internal Focus Group)
>
> The Programme of Works for Roads in the County includes a lot of road realignment and replacement of corners. Mostly these works only focus on concreting the infill with little consideration for tree planting. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

Inputs on Raising Awareness as part of the Tree Strategy

The following comments give an indication of the **opportunities to increase awareness** of the importance of trees:

> " The Covid19 pandemic has brought people out of their homes and cars to explore their neighbourhood within the 5 km range and they have become more aware of trees. (Business Focus Group)
>
> People are starting to re-imagine the concreted spaces in their neighbourhoods as possible green spaces with the increased awareness of the loss of biodiversity, which can also bring a focus on the role of trees. (Business Focus Group)

Residents are more aware of trees and climate change and the value of open spaces. It is an opportunity to increase awareness of Council programmes and projects to increase biodiversity and tree planting. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of **communicating the importance of trees**:

> " The neighbours are saying that they became aware of the importance of trees due to recent programmes on RTE1 showing what is going on around the country. (Business Focus Group)
>
> Tree planting during Tree Week organised by the Tree Council was televised on the Nationwide programme. (Business Focus Group)
>
> There is a need for tailored communications about the importance of trees, particularly around what they do for society, how helpful they are, and what communities can do for tree maintenance. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of **the importance of education regarding trees:**

> " Bring education pieces about trees back into the community so we can all learn more about trees in our area. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> There is a lot of potential to conduct more workshops and nature study visits involving local communities. (Community Focus Group)
>
> There is not enough information on the role of trees to alleviate flooding and to reduce air pollution. (dlr Internal Focus Group)
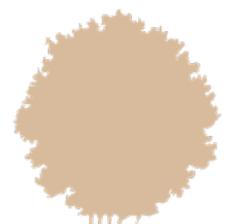
Inputs on Tree-related Actions as part of the Tree Strategy

The following comments give an indication of **how tree planting can be facilitated and promoted:**

> " At the Nutgrove Shopping Centre there are parks and green areas where trees could be planted, but it should not be skinny trees that are easily broken or pulled down. (Youth Focus Group 2)
>
> Higher densities in new housing developments should provide more space for tree planting, which should be encouraged via the planning system. (Business Focus Group)
>
> A more diverse range of tree species should be planted, especially given the possibility that certain species might be stricken by disease at certain times. (Business Focus Group)
>
> There should be a proactive strategy for tree planting in areas lacking adequate tree cover such as Sandyford Business District. (Community Focus Group)
>
> There is a need for a standard of good tree selection i.e. the right tree in the right place. (dlr Internal Focus Group)
>
> Show communities a list of suitable tree species for their area and ask them to make a choice which trees to plant so as to promote stewardship. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of how **tree and environmental management** can be facilitated and promoted:

> " It is fantastic to see how the Council's policy on wilding has added colour and freshness to the urban landscape. (Community Focus Group)

A Tree Officer needs to be appointed in the Council immediately with an appropriate budget to oversee the implementation of the Trees Strategy. (Community Focus Group)

What is the possibility for Council's planning policies to encourage more tree planting in car parks? (Community Focus Group)

Planning applications need to include tree planting lists and quality assurances with a requirement for a combination of mature trees and saplings. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of how trees can benefit from **stakeholder collaboration**:

" Many people in local communities who take an interest in trees could be asked to volunteer and help with tree management. (Business Focus Group)

There should be an inter-departmental task force coordinated by a Tree Officer supported by a Tree Team to effectively deal with tree management issues in the county. (Business Focus Group)

There is a great network of community-based organisations such as Tidy Districts and Men's Sheds in place to help with planting and caring for trees. (Community Focus Group)

There are opportunities for local initiatives involving community groups like Tidy Towns/Districts and NGOs like Crann working with the Council on tree planting and tree caring. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The Council can support schools to activate youth involvement in tree planting and caring. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give an indication of **the problems and issues associated with trees**:

> " I don't like it when tree leaves and petals get into my hair.
> (Youth Focus Group 2)

> We want trees planted in Hillview, but we are scared they will be burnt down.
> (Youth Focus Group 2)

> There is a shortage of trees in nurseries due to pent-up demand while people were locked down with the pandemic and kept themselves busy with gardening.
> (Business Focus Group)

> A lot of unqualified people trading in landscaping and as tree surgeons, because the industry is unregulated, who with poor knowledge can cause a lot of harm.
> (Business Focus Group)

> Sometimes developers plant trees that are not suitable for the local environment. (Business Focus Group)

> There is a need for the faster replacement of damaged trees and if possible with more mature trees. (Business Focus Group)

> What is the availability of Tree Preservation Orders to ensure tree protection?
> (Community Focus Group)

> New developments especially around Sandyford are using every inch of the space leaving no space for new planting while removing old trees.
> (Community Focus Group)

> The locations for planting new trees can become an issue with regard to street lighting if there is no joint-up thinking. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

> In a lot of Council estates the green verges were taken out causing a reduction in trees. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

Trees can cause hay fever. (Youth Focus Group 1)

The roots of mature trees sometimes cause problems for path maintenance and the Council's duty of care to residents. (dlr Internal Focus Group)

The following comments give **an indication of other ideas on how trees and our natural environment** can be facilitated and promoted:

"
We should learn from Scotland where Green Prescriptions are issued to avail of the health benefits derived from forest bathing and ecotherapy. (Community Focus Group)

The role of "tree amigos" - i.e. school children who identify tree issues in their neighbourhoods and report the issues to the Council. (Community Focus Group)

New technologies like Artificial Intelligence and using satellites and drones can help with tree identification and working smart. (Community Focus Group)

More signs in forest and woodlands giving information about trees. (Youth Focus Group 1)

Analysis of Focus Group Workshops

Youth Focus Groups

The same format, questionnaire and presentation by the dlr Parks and Landscape Services were used in both Youth Focus Groups.

In general there was a reasonably **low level of understanding and knowledge** of **the role and importance of trees.** Participants explained that they learn about trees in subjects like Geography especially about trees and Climate Change, but not about tree species and habitat. **Participants did indicate that they would like to learn more about trees.**

- When prompted, **very few participants indicated their personal involvement** in a tree planting event or in tree caring.

- There was **a much stronger connection to the value of park lands and green spaces** as places to meet others and for relaxation. Trees were also judged favourably in this context.

- It was clear that participants were **well aware of trees that had been removed especially in the vicinity of their schools or where new developments** are taking place.

Participants were prompted to discuss their thoughts and feelings about **Climate Change.** Concerns and fears were expressed for what Climate Change might mean for their future. Specific concerns were that the weather will become worse for animals and for people living along the coast; that there might be food shortages as crops get affected; and that species of wildlife and insects will face extinction. But, there was a low level of awareness specifically about trees and Climate Change, e.g. ignorance of their beneficial roles in Climate Mitigation and Climate Adaptation.

Business and Landowners Focus Group

The discussions with businesses and landowners **revealed similarly positive attitudes towards trees and their value** for the county, as was expressed in other Focus Groups. A strong observation was made of the changes in culture and activities of the local population brought about by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It was felt that the population's embrace of an outdoors lifestyle and regular use of open and green spaces bodes well for a better appreciation of the value of trees.

Opportunities for more outdoor activities including organised walks were highlighted. However, a caveat was entered that if these excursions involve private lands, the old bugbear of insurance would raise its head. It was pointed out that many landowners have to safeguard their premises with fencing to prevent people entering and possibly having accidents and causing damage for which they may want to sue the landowners.

The recent increase of publicity for trees on national television was discussed in the context of using the momentum **to increase local awareness campaigns.** These campaigns could be in communities but also on business premises for example at golf clubs. Even **simply labelling trees** so the general public can see what species they are will increase knowledge and awareness.

The **lack of regulations and the lack of urgency to apply tree protection measures** were emphasised. It is for example possible for anyone to start a business in landscaping and tree pruning with little or no qualifications in a system where there are no checks or quality assurances on services delivered. The consequences are sometimes devastating and damaging for trees.

The question was raised if there are local, regional and national strategies that would address the different facets of with healthy urban tree cover. In particular, the question focused on how progress will be measured in implementing the Strategy, as for example in reaching targets for planting and carbon sequestration.

Community Focus Group

Similar to the Business and Landowners Focus Group, participants in the Community Focus Group were very positive about recent developments initiated by the Council to realign streets and to create new spaces for pedestrians and cyclists, as well as benches in 'lingering spaces' in town centres. They saw these developments as reflecting a positive change in the perceptions of the public regarding the value of public spaces, the ethos of livability and the natural environment in general.

It was noted that the Council as well as many community groups have a proud history of tree planting and tree care. Examples given were the tree planting next to dual carriageways and the 11,000 plus trees planted by the Shankill Tidy Towns, one for every resident. The recent UN / Arbor Tree Foundation Tree City of the World award to the Council was lauded.

Many of the participants are personally involved in tree planting and tree caring. Their perspectives of the value of trees and the environment reflected their convictions on aspects such as the need to significantly expand the urban tree cover and to increase biodiversity in the County. There was general consensus that this can only be achieved by **establishing collaborative structures and supports in the County. This would require the Council, schools, universities, businesses and community groups taking joint responsibility for better stewardship of the environment, where trees can grow and flourish.**

There was also a sense of urgency in the Focus Group that the role of trees to ameliorate the impacts of Climate Change is not sufficiently emphasised and communicated.

This is not just a case of more formal education and communication, but should also be progressed in many smaller actions such as:

- Adults who volunteer to take older people, children and teenagers on tree talk walks through woodlands and their neighbourhoods

- Chalk drawings illustrating the value of trees

- Citizen science projects with schools and universities

- Dealing constructively with practical concerns such as the impact of trees on light and safety (i.e. try finding compromises and alternatives to just removing trees).

The need to be inclusive with tree-related actions was keenly felt. This meant that community groups and agencies should make concerted efforts to reach out to population cohorts who may otherwise be left behind, for example newcomers with limited language abilities and people with mobility disabilities. The inequality in tree cover in the County (i.e. the number of *tree-poor* neighbourhoods and districts) was also seen as a priority area to be addressed.

dlr Internal Focus Group

Discussions among staff from various Council departments revealed that there are few formal cross-departmental procedures governing tree-related matters, including healthy urban tree cover. However, there are several informal collegial relationships through which issues related to tree removal or tree planting can be raised. **The conclusion, however, was that this does not provide for a consistent and robust system and that more formal procedures should be agreed as internal policy.**

A number of practical suggestions were made which should be considered by senior management. These include changing the planning conditions for new developments from a requirement to prevent Net Biodiversity Loss to a requirement for delivering Gains in Biodiversity, including through the planting of more trees. The Planning Department should also require developers to submit Detailed Planting Plans for the consideration of dlr Parks and Landscape Services, so it can agree appropriate tree species, sizes and form.

Another new protocol was suggested to be agreed with all departments involved in new development projects (e.g. roads, housing, drainage etc.). The protocol would require those departments **to consult with dlr Parks and Landscape Services regarding the possibilities of including Tree Planting, and to seek its advice on the most appropriate species and Tree Pit Designs.** This will be a pro-active policy which could save costs of more expensive retrofitting, if a consultation is left too late.

It was further suggested that through collaboration between departments, **several innovative pilot projects could be initiated,** for example collaborating on water filtration and SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) along roads (dlr Transportation Department); sessions for reading about trees combined with walks to 'discover' trees in the county (dlr Libraries); community tree actions including planting and ceremonies (dlr Community Section); and smart counting of trees and assessment of needs to achieve equality of tree cover (Smart Dublin).

The idea was also mooted of identifying a Tree Champion in each Council department who would advocate for consideration of trees and liaise with other departments to address tree-related issues.

# Part V. Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

In the strategy development process, issues and ideas are never raised and analysed in a strict formulaic and orderly manner. This was also the case in this stage of the development of the dlr Trees Strategy 2022-2031. As events took place such as stakeholder analysis or survey results or Focus Group discussions, the Strategy team and the consultants discussed the ideas and issues raised during several online meetings. These were valuable moments for developing a shared understanding of the challenges and the opportunities to be addressed by the Strategy.

The report reflects these discussions. The value of this report is its use as a reference document for a spectrum of perspectives and ideas that can be followed up with stakeholders as well as for guiding decision making in dlr County Council as to the optimum path to reach a vision of a significantly expanded healthy urban tree cover in the County.

Summary

The process of Stakeholder Engagement has delivered the following outcomes:

- An in-depth analysis of which internal and external stakeholders could play different roles in the implementation of the Strategy.

- An in-depth discussion with participants (representative of different stakeholder categories)who should be approached for future collaboration in the implementation of the Strategy.

- A momentum for ongoing discussion and engagement, especially with structures that support young people (i.e. Comhairle na nÓg, Southside Partnership and Crosscare) and Community Groups, i.e. the dlr Public Participation Network.

- Inter-departmental discussions in dlr County Council to build the foundation for future collaboration, protocols and procedures.
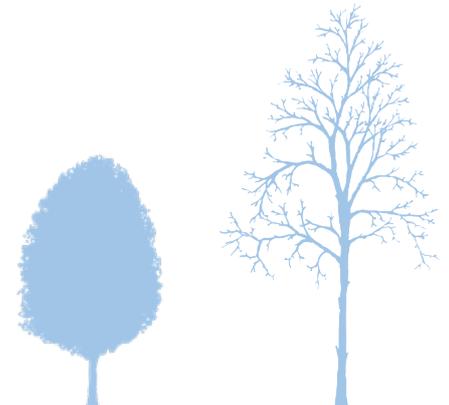
Conclusions

The main findings from the survey and Focus Group workshops can be summarised as follows:

- Most participants view trees as valuable adornments to their living environments.

- This passion does not necessarily translate to an understanding of the value of trees across a number of aspects ranging from climate change mitigation to habitat provision and biodiversity.

- There is a widespread willingness among many organisations and individuals to work with the local authority as well as with educational and research institutions to contribute to activities such as tree planting, tree care, tree talk walks and citizen science.

- There is also a general understanding that compromises and alternatives have to be found for problems such as risk to injury not covered by insurance, light obstruction and the removal of mature trees for new developments.

- Reducing the inequality of tree cover in the County should be a priority.

Recommendations

1. It is recommended that each of the above findings be addressed comprehensively in the Draft Trees and Urban Forestry Strategy.

2. It is important to build on the collaborative efforts in the Stakeholder Engagement process and to continue strengthening relationships with the participants, as it is to expand collaboration during implementation of the Strategy.

Finally, the momentum created in the Stakeholder Engagement process should be carried forward with more feedback and engagement with participants, including possible joint pilot actions as soon as is feasible.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Participating Organisations

Below please find the participants of the engagement process.

Business / Institutions	IFA and Dublin Mountains Private Forest Owners
	DLR Chamber of Commerce
	Dun Laoghaire Town Team
	Irish Management Institute
	Taylor Vard Equestrian
	Sandyford Business District
	Castle Golf Club
	Scalp Wood Nurseries
Internal dlr	dlr Municipal Services
	dlr Economic Development
	dlr Corporate Affairs
	dlr Forward planning
	dlr Community
	dlr Legal
	dlr Parks
	dlr Building Control
Community Groups	UCD (Estates, Landscaping and Grounds)
	IADT (Estates & Facilities)
	Shankill Tidy Towns
	Tidy Towns Chairperson
	FACE Foxrock Area Community and Enterprise
	Monkstown Village Tidy District
	Crann - Trees for Ireland
	Community Growers
	Meadowbrook Residents Association
	Stillorgan Wood Residents Association
	Dundrum Tidy Towns
	Patrician Residents Association Gardening Committee
	dlr Public Participation Network
Youth (facilitating organisations)	dlr Community
	Southside Partnership
	Crosscare

Appendix B: Stakeholder Survey Report

→ View the report sharing the findings from the stakeholder survey by here.

Appendix C: Focus Group Agendas

The agenda for the Business/Institutional, Community Groups, and Dlr Staff (Internal) Focus Groups is below:

    I.   Welcome (5 min)
    II.   Overview of Purpose of Focus Group and House Rules (5 min)
    III.   Introductions with Warm-Up (5 min)
    IV.   Presentation from DLR (10 min)
    V.   Facilitated Discussion in Breakout Rooms (80-90 min)
        A. Values and Principles of the Tree Strategy (15-20 min)
        B. Evaluation of Current State & Development of New Approaches regarding Awareness of Importance of Trees (25-30 min)
        C. Evaluation of Current State & Development of New Approaches regarding Actions to Increase Tree Cover (25-30 min)
    VI.   Reflection & Close (10-15 min)

The agenda for the two Youth Focus Groups is below:

    I.   Welcome & Overview of Purpose of Focus Group and House Rules (5 min)
    II.   Presentation (10 min)
    III.   Facilitated Discussion in Breakout Rooms (30- 40 minutes)
        A. Personal feelings about trees (5-10 minutes)
        B. Trees in your neighbourhood (5-10 minutes)
        C. Knowledge and value of trees (5-10 minutes)
        D. Trees and Climate Change (5-10 minutes)
    IV.   Reflection & Close (5-10 min)

Appendix D: Focus Group Worksheet Template

Worksheet Template

→ View the worksheet template used for all (except the Youth) Focus Groups here.

Appendix E: Focus Group Worksheets

Businesses/Institutional Focus Group

→ View the completed worksheet for the Business/Institutional Focus Group here.

Community Groups Focus Group

→ View the completed worksheet for the Community Groups Focus Group here.

Internal Focus Group

→ View the completed worksheet for the Internal Focus Group here.

Appendix F: Creative Asset Acknowledgement

Irish Tree Alphabet: This report has been designed with Katie Holten's Irish Tree Alphabet — a project that explores language ecosystems and the importance of our words and the stories that we tell. It allows us to write with Irish Trees.
More info www.TreeAlphabet.ie

Freepik: This report also features vector illustration by pch.vector from Freepik.

Thank You