

At this point it becomes crucial for communities to re-establish ties to their environment and recover a shared identity. There is now opportunity to use the best practice measures proposed here and build on the growing levels of environmental awareness and active public participation within Ireland to help urban communities rediscover a relationship with water. Water in the landscape also has an important role to play in addressing wider social objectives, such as promoting healthier lifestyles, aiding urban regeneration, combating social exclusion and reducing crime (ILAM 2000).

### 5.12.2 Principles of Public Participation

At the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio, Principle 1 of the Rio Declaration proclaimed that:

*“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”.*

The Rio conference also reiterated the message that real change is most likely to come with the involvement of ordinary people, as stated in Principle 10. These international principles have filtered down to the level where a community orientated, participatory approach is seen equally as necessary as a regulatory approach, for environmental action to be effective in the long term.

The participatory approach has now been formally recognised in Ireland under the Aarhus Convention. Two directives concerning access to environmental information (2003/4/EC) and public participation in environmental decision-making (2003/35/EC) have been adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in 2003. They have to be implemented in national law by 2005. The Directives make small changes to the public participation procedure required under the EIA and IPPC Directives and create a requirement for public consultation in preparing the plans or programmes specified in other Directives including the hazardous waste Directive (91/689), the Packaging Directive (94/62/EEC) and the Landfill Directive (99/31/EC). The recent SEA Directive (2001/42/EC) and the WFD (2000/60/EC) are already in line with the Aarhus Convention.

### 5.12.3 Application to Policy

The overall well-being of the community is of paramount importance in formulating and implementing any environmental management policy. It is therefore crucial that members of the community (in the most inclusive sense):

- have their needs and aspirations given first consideration;
- be made the prime beneficiary of any policy; and
- be empowered to sustainably manage their local environment as far as practicable.

The acceptance of these points requires ongoing commitment by all stakeholders to the continuing paradigm shift that started when the concept of sustainable development was first put forward in the late 1980s. This shift also advances the concept of sustainable community; an ideal form of community that will equitably invest in capital in its many forms in order to continually improve the quality of life for all its inhabitants.

To manage their environmental capital, a vision and structure is needed with regular input from local people, NGOs and private enterprises based in the area. Such structures should ideally be founded on partnership relationships and consensus decision-making, with government authorities providing technical and financial support for communities to achieve their chosen vision. The implementation of both the “Dublin – City of Possibilities” Strategy, to create a city of neighbourhoods, and individual Local Agenda 21 plans, with an emphasis on applying sustainable development principles locally, will play vital roles in guiding this process.

An important objective must be to improve watercourse and drainage systems in every way to aid in the creation of sustainable communities in Greater Dublin. To this end, the following inter-related issues should be addressed, for which there are many successful international examples, some of which are provided in Appendix D.

#### 5.12.4 Public Access

Public access to watercourses in Dublin is variable, with stretches of accessible riparian corridor often interspersed with developments built right to bank edge. Physical barriers like walls and fences are a common feature of urban development, but can confine people both physically and visually to highly developed areas. This tends to alienate people and severely restricts their enjoyment of natural surroundings.

Good examples of resolving access/security issues are to be found in various river/floodplain rehabilitation projects, and campaigns by local community/environmental groups. The introduction of landscape character assessments and riparian surveys should help to promote better access and prompt a re-evaluation of the need for artificial barriers. The issue of securing undeveloped land for the travelling community should also be addressed with time, in line with the findings of the various governmental task forces and the 1997 DoEHLG guidelines for residential caravan parks for travellers.

#### 5.12.5 Recreation and Amenity

By including natural, clean and accessible waterways into the urban environment we bring prosperity, continuity and enjoyment to our lives (ILAM 2000). Numerous opportunities now exist for promoting better, more imaginative uses of under-utilised watercourses and for the creation of multi-use, new ones.

Firstly, establishing landscaped linear parks along riparian corridors will allow people to enjoy a natural riverside setting while simultaneously encouraging healthy outdoor activities like walking, fishing, playing and swimming. Rehabilitating watercourses using a combination of landscaped elements within particular urban settings, can give a place a sense of identity and uniqueness. Running water can also mask city noise and convey positive feelings of calm and beauty, contributing to a sense of well-being. Refer to **Chapter 6** and **Appendix D** for examples of the recreational and amenity value of well managed and maintained SuDS.

Properly designed and maintained ponds and wetlands, as well as providing for the above, can add substantial value to commercial and residential estates. Finally, stand-alone water features, such as paddling pools, ornamental ponds and fountains can also be easily incorporated into estates and be fed via water re-use methods (refer **Section 5.4.3**). These could form part of any urban park or play area.

#### 5.12.6 Public Health and Safety

Public health and safety with regards to water is a significant issue in Ireland, because of the perceived risk of drowning or infection. Although water presents an inherent risk, the number of deaths by drowning are far outweighed by home or road deaths. The risk of water-related deaths can also be minimised through risk assessments and appropriate safety precautions, with a particular emphasis on child safety.

People and particularly children, enjoy water and should be encouraged to play and develop confidence with it. At the same time however, a healthy respect for water and its potential hazards must be engendered. This can be accomplished by promoting swimming/lifesaving lessons but also by educating on the dangers of flooding and structures e.g. culverts, weirs, etc. Contact with dedicated water quality control devices or watercourses with known poor water quality should however be discouraged. Ultimately, provided health and safety is reasonably catered for, the benefits of natural, open waterbodies should ultimately outweigh the risks.

#### 5.12.7 Enterprise and Funding

There is great potential for enterprising communities or private companies in Ireland to take advantage of ongoing developments in the provision of sustainable drainage. For example, local research and development is urgently needed on international technologies so that they can be modified and applied to Irish conditions. This may include not only the physical elements, but decision support tools and models which could be developed by local organisations.

The re-use of stormwater can also provide a raw resource for new ventures. For example, re-cycled water can be used as an input to industrial processes and for irrigation of city farms, urban forests or community gardens.

Enterprising organisations who propose innovative solutions can apply for several sources of funding to assist in implementing sustainable drainage schemes. For example, the DoEHLG Local Agenda 21 Environmental Partnership Fund 2003 is available to assist with projects to increase public environmental awareness. Funding for larger scale projects can be provided through the EU LIFE programme. For example, the Dublin City Eco Zone: Integrated River Planning for the tributaries of the Liffey received funding from this source. Such funding should be sought to help finance pilot SuDS in the Greater Dublin Area.

The INTERREG III B Community Initiative (refer **Section 2.5.4** above) could provide a source of funding for SuDS research and development initiatives.

### 5.12.8 Education and Community Action

Water presents the community with a valuable and innovative resource for life-long learning. Education programmes run by government authorities and/or community groups can showcase and celebrate the many roles of water. River open days, festivals and school study trips are well known examples of such programmes, where people can learn about water quality, aquatic ecology and the history of river catchments. People thus become more aware of the hydrological cycle and their impact upon it.

The purpose of such programmes should not only be to inform but to also encourage community to 'adopt' and take care of water as an important natural resource. There are several Irish organisations such as Caretakers of the Environment, Environment Watch and Conservation Volunteers that can provide valuable technical assistance to community groups in this regard.

Community-based natural resource management is an excellent way of instilling a sense of environmental stewardship in the long term. It takes many years of work to establish an effective management structure but benefits such as community pride and a cleaner environment make it an attractive option. The measures proposed by DCDB (2001) to make Dublin a greener city are also applicable here.

Some examples of community based natural resource management from the American and Australian experience are given in Appendix D. **Figure 43** below illustrates a further example of community participation. In the Greater Melbourne Area, many urban watercourses provide habitat for platypus. Because of its tangible appeal to both children and adults, the platypus has been adopted as a mascot by Melbourne Water Authority and used successfully in public awareness campaigns, such as drain stencilling. Stencil kits are sold to local primary schools who undertake the stencilling, thus promoting community awareness of the path of stormwater pollution. The community also get involved in reporting sightings of platypus to the Platypus Care program. Community action days to clear litter from local creeks also help reduce platypus injuries and fatalities when they become entangled in litter, as well as providing the obvious aesthetic benefits.



**Figure 43: Drain Stencil, Melbourne, Australia**



**Figure 44: Public Awareness Poster, Paris**  
(This street sign translates to *'I love my district, I gather'*)

Eye catching street signs which grab the attention of the passer-by such as the example in given in **Figure 44** may help to encourage community involvement and adoption of best management practices by engendering individual responsibility.

#### Recommendations

45. Local authorities to give needs and aspirations of local communities' prime consideration in this policy.
46. Local authorities to investigate ways to improve safe access to watercourses.
47. Local authorities to strongly encourage public participation in all natural resource management strategies with a view to community-based management.
48. All authorities to promote public awareness of sustainable drainage and support community groups in undertaking their own related projects.

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