

**Test Valley Revised Local Plan DPD
2011 – 2029
Regulation 22 – Submission to
Secretary of State**

**Policy LHW1:
Public Open Space Topic Paper**

June 2014

REVISED LOCAL PLAN

TOPIC PAPER – POLICY LHW1 PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide background justification to the inclusion of the policy on public open space within the Test Valley Revised Local Plan.
- 1.2 This matter has links to the health and wellbeing of the population and supporting sport and recreation activities within the Borough. It has been reported that access to green and open spaces decreases health inequalities, increases life expectancy and generally has a positive impact on health and wellbeing¹.
- 1.3 Based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation, the health of the population of Test Valley is above the national average. In addition, the Sport England Active People surveys indicate that participation in sport and active recreation are above the national average. However, there are variations across the Borough.

2 Policy Context

National Guidance

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)² recognises the importance of supporting healthy communities as part of the social dimension of sustainable development (see paragraph 7). Section 8 of the NPPF gives more detailed consideration to the role of open space, sport and recreation provision.
- 2.2 Paragraph 70 sets out the need to plan positively for provision and use of community facilities (including sports facilities) and to guard against their unnecessary loss. Paragraphs 73 and 74 of the NPPF give more specific consideration to access to and retention of open space, recreation and sports facilities. Paragraph 73 highlights the importance of up to date assessments informing the approach to such provisions. Paragraph 74 sets out the framework for the exceptional circumstances when such provisions may be lost.
- 2.3 The National Planning Practice Guidance³ includes a section on open space, sports and recreation facilities. This recognises the variety of forms of open space, from formal sports pitches to country parks. The multiple benefits of

¹ Great Outdoors: How our Natural Health Service Uses Green Space to Improve Wellbeing, Faculty of Public Health and Natural England, 2010.

² National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012.

³ Available: <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk/>

open spaces are recognised, including in terms of health, ecology, landscape character and the setting of built development⁴. It is set out that it is for local planning authorities to assess the need for open space and regard should be had to Sport England guidance in relation to sport and recreation facilities⁵.

Local Evidence and Strategies

- 2.4 A Playing Pitch Strategy was prepared for the Borough in 2004, considering the availability of sports pitches and identifying recommendations to ensure provision reflected demand by sport and age group participating.
- 2.5 This strategy was prepared so as to have a 10 year life. As such, the Council has commissioned consultants to refresh the strategy and incorporate it into a Sport and Recreation Strategy, which will cover a wider remit of sports and recreational pursuits. The evidence to inform these strategies has been collated and were being finalised at the time of writing this paper. The emerging strategies have been prepared following Sport England guidance and have involved Sport England and the National Governing Bodies for the key pitch based sports.
- 2.6 The Council prepared a Green Space Strategy (2007) which establishes the approach to managing Council owned green spaces. It provides a set of objectives linked to how the Council will manage such provisions, including ensuring their quality over the 10 year life of the strategy. Actions are identified linked to strategic priorities identified within the strategy.
- 2.7 More recently, the Council has undertaken a survey of residents to further understand what attracts people to local green spaces and how they could be improved⁶. This highlighted that a high proportion of those surveyed used open green spaces, in many cases on a regular basis. Largely, general characteristics of spaces were recognised as being important in deciding which spaces to visit, linked to the activities that could be undertaken and the nature of the environment for example.
- 2.8 In addition, in 2012 an Audit was undertaken of public open spaces within the Borough using the definitions within the Borough Local Plan 2006 (policy ESN22 and Annex 1). This identified surpluses and deficits by Parish (or Ward in Andover and Romsey) and gave a snapshot of the quality of open spaces.

3 Revised Local Plan

- 3.1 In considering the approach to open space, sport and recreation within the Revised Local Plan, the requirements of the NPPF provide a key consideration. Regard was also had to the performance of the standards for public open space contained within the Borough Local Plan 2006, including through drawing on public open space provision for newer developments planned against the standards within the Borough Local Plan. Taking this into

⁴ Reference ID: 37-001-20140306

⁵ Reference ID: 37-002-20140306

⁶ Open Spaces Residents Survey 2013-14, Qa Research, 2014.

account the existing standards were considered to be fit for purpose. It was considered appropriate to provide some clarification on the definitions of the types of public open space being considered.

- 3.2 However, there is a growing demand for allotments within the Borough, which was not being supported through the identification of need for such provisions in conjunction with new development. As such it was considered appropriate to consider an additional requirement for allotments. Having regard to advice provided by the National Society of Allotments and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) a standard of 0.2 hectares per 1,000 population was put forward.
- 3.3 Conversion factors are used to determine the scale of requirement for public open space based on the mix of dwellings proposed as part of residential schemes. This is done through comparing number of bedrooms to number of persons. The conversions within the Borough Local Plan 2006 were reviewed and considered to remain up to date. Where dwelling size is unknown, a conversion of 2.4 persons per dwelling has been used. For information, based on the 2011 Census, the average persons per dwelling in Test Valley is 2.37 to the nearest two decimal places.
- 3.4 The policy proposes that the starting point should be the provision of the relevant public open space requirement. However, it is recognised that this is not always possible or appropriate, as such off site provision or contributions towards public open space may be acceptable. Given the predominantly rural nature of the Borough, it is not appropriate to establish catchments for open space or distances from development to open space provision. It is proposed that the supporting text to the emerging policy establishes that open space should be located so as to be convenient to residents.
- 3.5 It was considered appropriate to clarify the circumstances when the loss of open space, sport and recreation facilities may be considered acceptable. Regard was had to paragraph 74 of the NPPF in identifying such circumstances. Consultation on the proposed wording of the policy included requests to add other circumstances when provisions may be lost, such as for surplus school playing fields. However, it was considered appropriate to focus on those cases where losses may be acceptable in line with the NPPF.

4 Proposed Way Forward

- 4.1 Taking account of national guidance and the local situation, a single policy is proposed in relation to the provision and retention of open space, sport and recreation facilities. The standards required are based on past experience within the Borough and increased demand for allotment provision.
- 4.2 The proposed policy wording is set out below.

Policy LHW1: Public Open Space

New housing development where there is a net increase in population will be permitted subject to:

- a) the provision of open space to a standard of at least 3 hectares per 1,000 population comprising:
 - outdoor sports facilities 1.0 hectares
 - parks and public gardens 0.4 hectares
 - informal recreation areas 0.8 hectares
 - provision for children and teenagers 0.6 hectares
 - allotments 0.2 hectares

as net areas of usable open space, excluding access, parking, ancillary buildings, landscaping and safety margins;

- b) the laying out and equipping of the open space to a high standard at an early stage in the development; and
- c) arrangements for the long term maintenance for the open space, equipment or facility having been made.

Development proposals that would result in the loss of existing open spaces or other recreation facilities will only be permitted if:

- d) the space or facility is not needed to meet the full range of leisure and recreational needs of the local community;
- e) the proposed development is for an alternative open space, sport or recreation facility for which there is such a need as to outweigh the loss; or
- f) any space or facility to be lost would be replaced by an equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality and be in a suitable location.