

Leisure and Recreation

Introduction

11.1 Participation in sport and recreation has increased significantly during the last decade in line with rising disposable incomes, increasing leisure time and the growth of public interest in health and fitness. Most people now take part in some form of active recreation, whether it is playing a sport or simply walking in the countryside. This trend seems likely to continue in the foreseeable future, with greater demands for further and better recreational facilities.

11.2 In Wealden, the Town and Parish Councils have traditionally been responsible for the provision of recreational open space, including children's playgrounds, playing fields, and other facilities for outdoor sport. Indoor recreational facilities are largely concentrated in the three multi-purpose leisure centres managed by the District Council at Crowborough, Hailsham and Uckfield. However, financial constraints are increasingly limiting the ability of public bodies to make direct provision for such facilities, and it is likely that the private and voluntary sectors will play a growing role in meeting future leisure requirements.

11.3 This chapter addresses recreation and open space requirements within the District, focussing principally on the need for outdoor playing space within the towns and villages. Proposals for leisure-related developments which may arise in the countryside, such as additional golf courses, facilities for motor sports or 'combat' gaming, are considered within the context of Chapter 5, while tourism-related proposals are covered by the policies in Chapter 10. Site specific proposals are detailed in the appropriate settlement chapter of the Plan.

STRATEGY

11.4 The Council recognises the important contribution that recreation can make both to the individual's health and sense of well-being, and to the general quality of life enjoyed by those living and working in Wealden District. It therefore aims to promote the development of sport and recreation in the District, to achieve greater levels of participation in sporting and recreational activities, and to encourage the provision of a wide range of recreational opportunities to benefit all sections of the community. In seeking to achieve these aims, it will work in partnership with a wide range of public, private and voluntary agencies.

11.5 The Council will seek the retention and provision of recreational open space in towns and villages,

together with the development of an appropriate range and standard of facilities for indoor sport and recreation. It is the aim of the Council's corporate Leisure Strategy to develop and promote the role of Crowborough, Hailsham and Uckfield as local centres for indoor sports and leisure activities in view of their overall accessibility and existing level of facilities. At the same time the Council will support and encourage Town and Parish Council initiatives to improve the existing level of recreational provision in other towns and villages, in recognition of their important role in meeting the leisure needs of the wider community.

11.6 Within the countryside further opportunities for quiet, informal recreation will be sought and encouraged. The Council aims to develop the potential for access to the countryside through the public rights of way network, the further improvement and extension of the Cuckoo Trail, and the provision of publicity and information for both residents and visitors.

11.7 In accordance with this strategy, the main objectives for recreation are:-

(1) to encourage the provision of a wide range of opportunities for both formal and informal recreation where this would not adversely affect the amenities of adjoining occupiers or the attractiveness of the countryside;

(2) to safeguard, and make the most effective use of, existing outdoor playing space, and to improve the level of provision wherever possible;

(3) to seek to ensure that adequate provision is made for outdoor playing space and informal amenity areas within new residential developments;

(4) to improve access to the countryside;

(5) to encourage Town and Parish Council and voluntary initiatives in the provision of sports and recreational facilities, where appropriate.

11.8 These aims have been formulated having regard to Government guidance, particularly in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, 'Sport and Recreation', and the strategic framework provided by the Council's corporate Leisure Strategy and the County Structure Plan. The policies of the County Structure Plan make provision for more and better recreational facilities but in a carefully controlled and managed way to protect the environment, both for its own sake and as a recreational asset.

OUTDOOR PLAYING SPACE

11.9 Government advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 states that it is the Local Planning Authority's responsibility to take full account of the community's need for recreational space, to have regard to current levels of provision and deficiencies, and to resist pressures for the development of open space which conflict with the wider public interest.

11.10 The standard most generally applied to the provision of outdoor playing space is that recommended by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA), of a minimum of 2.4 hectares per thousand population. This comprises 1.6-1.8 hectares of space for youth and adult use (including playing pitches, courts and greens) and 0.6-0.8 hectares of children's play space (defined as equipped playgrounds and casual play space within housing areas). The standard specifically excludes informal amenity space, ornamental gardens, parks and woodland.

11.11 Appendix 8 indicates the overall provision of outdoor playing space in Wealden's towns, illustrating those that fall below the NPFA recommended levels and the particular deficiencies in the provision of children's play space. However, a reasonable level of provision is achieved in many of the rural areas of the District, with most of the larger villages possessing at least one recreation ground. Areas of deficiency are considered in more detail in the following sections.

11.12 The principal requirement for youth and adult use derives from the four team sports of cricket, football, hockey and rugby. In previous years, the provision of sports pitches has been achieved in association with large new housing developments. However, Local Plan studies have identified a need for additional sports pitches in all Wealden's towns, with a number of facilities suffering from over-use. Unfortunately the opportunities for providing additional pitches are limited due to the lack of sites in Town or Parish Council ownership, although land has been identified for the provision of further playing fields at Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield, as described in the relevant town chapters. Consultations carried out with Parish Councils indicate a degree of satisfaction with the overall level of pitch provision in rural areas, except at Danehill, Framfield, Hellingly and Maresfield. Areas of the District deficient in facilities for tennis and bowls are listed in Appendix 8. Town and Parish Council initiatives for the provision of further outdoor recreational facilities will be supported where appropriate.

11.13 The opportunities for rectifying the shortfall in children's play space are limited due to financial constraints and the fact that the worst deficiencies occur within existing residential areas, where there is

little prospect of suitable sites becoming available. However, a number of potential locations for additional provision are identified in the individual settlement chapters where appropriate, and the Council will normally require the provision of adequate children's play space in all large new residential developments, in accordance with Policy LR3.

11.14 It is clear from the deficiencies in outdoor playing space identified above that there is a need for this Council and the Town and Parish Councils to realise opportunities to secure the provision of additional facilities where appropriate. Policy LR1 states the Council's intention to ensure that adequate recreational open space is provided to meet the needs of existing and future residents.

11.15 In order to provide an appropriate basis for the provision of outdoor playing space, the Council has adopted as a minimum standard the recommendation of the NPFA, as outlined above.

LR1 The Council will seek to ensure that adequate outdoor playing space is provided in towns and villages within the District in accordance with the levels recommended by the National Playing Fields Association. This will be achieved by:

- (1) protecting existing outdoor playing space or other open space with recreational or amenity value (Policy LR2);**
- (2) the provision of children's play space in new residential developments of 30 or more dwellings (Policy LR3);**
- (3) the provision of artificial turf pitches on appropriate sites.**

Existing Outdoor Playing Space

11.16 In view of the shortages of outdoor playing space within the District and the difficulties in securing new public open space, it is important that existing facilities are retained and their use maximised. It is also important that other recreational open space which is, or could be, of benefit to the local community is retained for public use. Playing fields, whether owned by public, private or voluntary organisations, are regarded as particularly significant for their recreational and amenity value. The Council will therefore protect such facilities from development, in accordance with the advice set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 17, unless specific circumstances apply.

LR2 Development proposals which would result in the loss of existing outdoor playing

space, or other open space with recreational or amenity value, will not be permitted. In particular, planning permission will not be granted for the loss of existing playing fields, whether privately or publicly owned. An exception may be made where the redevelopment of part of the site would enhance the recreational facilities available, where alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available nearby, or where it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Council that there is an excess of outdoor playing space in the area.

Outdoor Playing Space in New Housing Developments

11.17 It is now widely accepted that new residential developments should make adequate provision for recreational open space to meet the needs of the prospective occupants. The standards adopted for such provision are usually related to the NPFA target of 2.4 hectares per thousand population, as outlined above. However, whilst the provision of outdoor playing space in accordance with NPFA standards can generally be readily achieved on large new residential development, for smaller schemes it is seldom possible to provide a worthwhile and usable level of open space on site.

11.18 In view of the limited size and number of the housing sites likely to come forward in the period to 2004, over and above the committed situation, it is considered that it would be unrealistic in this Plan to require all new residential developments to incorporate the full range of open space facilities recommended by the NPFA. The Council has therefore identified a threshold above which developers will normally be required to provide play space for children, as set out below. In determining the precise requirement for any individual development, the following factors will also be taken into account:-

- (i) the type of housing proposed;
- (ii) the location of the site;
- (iii) any local play space deficiencies.

Children's Play Space

11.19 It is considered that the provision of adequate play space for children should, in most circumstances, be an essential requirement of all developments of 30 or more dwellings. Within such developments, the Council will therefore require the provision of safe and readily accessible play areas at a rate of 0.6-0.8 hectares per thousand population. This overall allocation should comprise both an equipped children's play area at a rate of 0.2-0.3 hectares per thousand

population, and casual or informal play space at a rate of 0.4-0.5 hectares per thousand population, as described below. An exception to this policy will be made in the case of sheltered housing or other specialist accommodation for the elderly/retired.

11.20 Equipped play areas should be located within a short walking distance of each home, with safe and convenient pedestrian access. They should include provision for the under fives, be provided with seating, and allow easy supervision by parents. Particular attention should be given to minimising disturbance to adjoining residents and avoiding the risk of vandalism and crime by means of layout, design and location. Play equipment should conform to British Standard 5696 and normally be installed by first occupation of the associated housing. Appropriate safety surfacing will be required in all equipped play areas.

11.21 Casual play space, or kickabout areas, are important to meet the needs of children for casual play, informal games and other activities which cannot normally take place within an equipped playground or sports field. To fulfil their purpose, such areas should be situated within a short walking distance of each home and sited to avoid the risk of road accidents or nuisance to neighbours. They are not meant for organised team games nor do pitches need to be marked out. They should be carefully landscaped, free-draining and for the most part reasonably level to allow for ball games. Where appropriate, provision could be made for part of these areas to be hard-surfaced to allow opportunities for activities such as cycling.

LR3 The Council will require new residential development of 30 or more dwellings to contain children's play space at a rate of 0.6 – 0.8 hectares per thousand population, including an equipped area at a rate of 0.2 – 0.3 hectares per thousand population. This space should:-

- (1) be located where it can be used safely, conveniently and without causing excessive noise or other disturbance to adjoining areas;**
- (2) be properly drained, laid out, equipped and landscaped;**
- (3) be additional to any amenity, incidental or other open space.**

A capital sum, or other arrangement to the satisfaction of the District Council, will be sought for future maintenance.

11.22 Rather than applying an average household size to calculate the population of a proposed development, it is considered more appropriate to base such an assessment on the number of people likely to occupy

each dwelling. The method which will be used to implement the above policy is detailed in Appendix 8.

Artificial Turf Pitches

11.23 Artificial turf or 'all weather' pitches can theoretically accommodate 30 times more hours of play than natural grass and are now gaining wide recognition, particularly by sports such as hockey. Whilst synthetic pitches do not normally solve the problem of peaking usage (e.g. at weekends), they do allow for play throughout the year and, with floodlighting, can substantially alleviate pressures on existing playing fields. Such facilities are most beneficially located within school sites in order to maximise day time usage.

11.24 The Sports Council has identified Crowborough as a priority area for a floodlit artificial turf pitch. In East Sussex such facilities are currently limited to Seaford and Portslade. Whilst the Council seeks to encourage the provision of artificial turf pitches on appropriate sites in Crowborough and other parts of the District, it recognises that floodlighting, together with increased levels of activity in the evenings, can be of particular concern in some areas. Proposals for artificial turf pitches will therefore only be permitted where the amenities of adjoining occupiers and the character of the locality would not be unacceptably affected.

LR4 Proposals for the provision of artificial turf pitches may be permitted where there is no unacceptably adverse impact on the amenities of adjoining occupiers or the character of the locality. Control over hours of operation may be required by condition of any planning permission.

INFORMAL AMENITY AREAS

11.25 In addition to the provision of outdoor playing space, informal open space has a valuable role in terms of its recreational and amenity potential. This type of space, which includes both open and wooded areas, offers opportunities for passive recreation and often makes an important contribution to the character of an area and to wildlife conservation, particularly within built-up areas.

11.26 Whilst it is desirable that everyone should have convenient access to informal open space, this does not fall within NPFA guidelines nor are there any other generally accepted standards which can be applied. However, in order to offset to some extent the deficiencies in formal outdoor recreation facilities, the Council will take every opportunity to increase the amount of informal amenity space which is accessible to the public. This will include utilising the amenity

potential of existing features and providing additional open space in association with the development of new sites.

11.27 A number of opportunities for the provision of informal open space have been identified and are described in the relevant settlement chapters. In addition, Policy LR5 seeks to secure informal amenity areas, additional to the children's play space required to meet minimum standards, in all large housing developments.

LR5 The Council will seek the provision of informal amenity space, additional to the outdoor playing space required under Policy LR3, in all large new housing developments, where appropriate, incorporating existing landscape features such as trees, hedgerows, etc.

ALLOTMENTS

11.28 The District Council, Town Councils and many of the Parish Councils maintain allotments. The existing provision within the District is generally adequate, with evidence of vacant plots in many areas, and there is no known requirement to allocate additional land for allotment purposes at present. However, it is considered that existing allotments represent a valuable facility, particularly in view of the trend towards increased leisure time. Proposals to develop allotment land will therefore normally be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that suitable alternative provision will be made elsewhere or that other exceptional circumstances prevail.

LR6 Proposals for the development of allotment land will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that adequate and suitable alternative provision can be made elsewhere.

INDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES

11.29 Wealden is relatively well-equipped in terms of indoor sports facilities. Goldsmith's Leisure Centre in Crowborough, Utopia in Uckfield and the Lagoon in Hailsham, each offer an extensive range of facilities for indoor sports, including swimming, squash, badminton, 5-a-side football, basketball, gymnastics, trampolining, weight training and fitness classes. Since the completion of the dual use sports hall at Heathfield Community College, 80% of the District's population now live within three miles of public indoor leisure facilities.

11.30 In view of this wide range of provision, the often very high costs of providing new facilities, and current constraints on public spending, the Council's Corporate Leisure Strategy gives priority to maximising the usage of the existing leisure services rather than making direct provision for additional indoor facilities. Initiatives such as the Oasis Project, which aims to increase participation in recreational activity through partnership between the Council and health agencies, are already achieving success in this respect at all three Leisure Centres..

11.31 Whilst there is unlikely to be further public sector provision of purpose-built indoor sports facilities during the Plan period, it is recognised that there may be a demand for commercial facilities catering for sports such as tennis, squash and fitness-training. Such facilities need to be as accessible as possible and do not generally require a rural location. They usually involve substantial new buildings and car parking and, in view of the strategy of protecting the countryside from inappropriate development, it is considered that new proposals for indoor sports facilities should normally be located within the town or village development boundaries. Small-scale proposals may be acceptable in the countryside where they are ancillary to an existing use or represent the use of an existing building. However, planning permission is unlikely to be granted for such uses in the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or on the Ashdown Forest, where it is intended to provide only for informal recreational activity in association with the quiet enjoyment of the countryside in accordance with Policy S18 of the approved Structure Plan.

LR7 Proposals for indoor sports or leisure facilities will not be permitted outside development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, unless they are small in scale and are ancillary to an existing use, or represent the use of an existing agricultural or other rural building, in accordance with Policy DC7.

11.32 Whilst the leisure centres in the towns have extensive catchment areas, covering the north, south and centre of the District, it is recognised that recreational opportunities for a significant proportion of Wealden's population remain limited. The more rural areas lack facilities for indoor sport and recreation, and access to the towns is often restricted due to a lack of private transport or the inadequacy of public transport. This particularly affects those sections of the community who characteristically have low sports participation rates, i.e. women, children, the elderly and disabled.

11.33 Obviously, most small rural communities are not able to support the provision of a purpose-built sports hall. Such facilities, as well as being expensive to construct, will usually accrue heavy revenue costs

and will rely on a large catchment population to be financially viable.

11.34 However, in most parts of the District, community halls already make a vital contribution to village life and, with minor adaptations, many could accommodate a wide range of recreational pursuits. These facilities are managed by a variety of different organisations, including Parish Councils, voluntary bodies and churches. Consultations with the Town and Parish Councils have identified a need for new community halls at East Dean, Herstmonceux, Laughton, Polegate and Willingdon. Specific proposals are contained in the relevant settlement chapter where appropriate, but Policy LR8 provides for new, extended or improved facilities where other opportunities arise.

LR8 Proposals for new, extended or improved community halls will be permitted within the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map. In exceptional circumstances, proposals for such facilities will be permitted outside the development boundaries provided that the following criteria are met:

- (1) the proposed development is essential to meet the needs of the local community;**
- (2) the proposed development cannot be accommodated satisfactorily within the development boundaries;**
- (3) the proposed development would not be unduly intrusive in the landscape, or detrimental to the character and appearance of the countryside.**

COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION

11.35 The importance of the countryside for recreation lies in the wide variety of opportunities it offers to people of all ages, capabilities and interests. Countryside recreation is now the most popular form of outdoor leisure activity and covers an enormous range of pursuits, including well established sports such as angling and newer activities such as hang gliding. The vast majority of people, however, visit the countryside to enjoy casual or informal activities that require no particular skills and few, if any, special facilities.

11.36 Whilst recognising the landscape and other environmental constraints to development in much of the District, the Council is aware of the need to improve and extend opportunities for both residents and visitors to enjoy the countryside and its wildlife. It will therefore support and encourage measures to

facilitate access to the countryside for informal and passive recreation, where this is consistent with other policies and proposals in the Plan. Such measures will include negotiating access agreements with landowners, promoting and developing safe routes for walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and the introduction, where appropriate, of picnic areas, car parks and other visitor facilities at access points to the wider countryside.

(3) provision of new indoor community facilities;

Footpaths and Bridleways

11.37 The public footpath and bridleway network represents a valuable recreational resource, enabling walkers and riders to gain access to and enjoy the countryside with minimal disturbance to farmers and other landowners. The Council will promote the use of this network by encouraging its maintenance and improvement where possible, seeking to ensure that all routes are appropriately surfaced, signposted, waymarked and kept free of obstruction and seeking to promote, where development affects public rights of way, the maintenance of these routes by preventing their obstruction or promoting a sensitive diversion.

The Cuckoo Trail

11.38 An important existing facility is the Cuckoo Trail, a traffic free path for shared use by walkers, cyclists, the disabled and, in parts, horse riders between Heathfield and Polegate. The Council, in association with Sustrans Ltd, is working with the County Council and local Parish Councils to extend the Trail northwards to the Kent border and southwards to Eastbourne, where it will link with similar facilities being provided in the Eastbourne Park area. It is envisaged that within ten years the Trail will form a key link within the National Cycle Network, a series of high quality, safe and attractive routes reaching all parts of mainland Britain. In addition the Council will promote the use of other leisure cycle routes and seek new opportunities for recreational cycling.

Implementation

11.39 Policies LR1 to LR8 inclusive will be implemented by the Council primarily through its development control function.

Monitoring

11.40 The key areas to be monitored will include:-

(1) the overall provision of outdoor play space in the towns and villages;

(2) the provision of outdoor play space in new housing developments;