

Chapter 12

Leisure and Recreation

Context

12.1 Participation in sport and recreation has increased significantly during the last twenty years or so 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, with greater demands for further and better recreational facilities.

12.2 In Wealden, the Town and Parish Councils have traditionally been responsible for the provision and maintenance of recreational open space, including children's playgrounds, playing fields, and other facilities for outdoor sport. Indoor recreational facilities are largely concentrated in the multi-purpose leisure centres at Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield and Uckfield. However, financial constraints limit the ability of Councils to make direct provision for such facilities, and the private and voluntary sectors will continue to play an important role in meeting future leisure requirements. Lottery funding has become an important source of finance for sport and recreation, often based on partnership working.

12.3 Government guidance emphasises the importance of the provision and protection of sport and recreation facilities and of open space as a valuable contribution to improving the quality of life in urban and rural areas. Structure Plan policies aim to provide for the increasing leisure needs of the local population where this is compatible with the conservation of the environment and local character.

12.4 It is the aim of the Council's leisure and cultural objectives to sustain the existing indoor sports and leisure centres in view of their overall accessibility and existing level of facilities, and encourage a network of smaller facilities, particularly in the rural areas as part of a planned, co-ordinated approach. In this regard, the Council will support and encourage initiatives by Town and Parish Councils, voluntary organizations and the private sector. In the countryside further opportunities for quiet, informal recreation will be sought and encouraged.

12.5 This chapter addresses recreation and open space requirements within the District, focusing principally on the need for outdoor playing space and indoor facilities within the towns and villages. Proposals for leisure-related developments that may arise in the countryside are considered in Chapter 6, while tourism-related proposals are covered by the policies in Chapter 11. Site-specific proposals are covered in the appropriate settlements chapter of the Plan.

Strategy

12.6 The Plan's strategy for meeting leisure and recreation needs gives emphasis to retaining existing open space and indoor facilities in towns and villages, and making new provision where this is consistent with environmental and sustainability considerations, particularly in relation to the increased demand generated by new housing development.

12.7 In accordance with Government guidance, the Structure Plan, the Council's leisure and cultural objectives and the Local Plan strategy itself, the main objectives for leisure and recreation are:

- 1) *to encourage the provision of a wide range of opportunities for both formal and informal recreation to meet the needs of existing and future residents, 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 recreation and leisure facilities, and to improve the level of provision wherever possible;*
- 3) *to seek to ensure that adequate provision is made for outdoor playing space, indoor facilities and informal amenity areas in relation to new residential developments;*
- 4) *to improve access to the countryside.*

Protection of existing recreational open space

12.8 Open space is an important asset to the community and may be subject to increasing pressures for development, particularly within the development boundaries of towns and villages. Government guidance states that existing open space, sport and recreational buildings and land, should not be developed in urban areas, unless the planning authority's assessments show them to be clearly surplus to requirements. In view of the general shortage of outdoor playing space, particularly within the towns, and the difficulties in securing new provision, it is important that existing facilities that are of particular value to the community, or have the potential to be, are retained and their use maximised. In a similar vein, it is also important that informal recreational open space is retained. Whilst consultations with the Town and Parish Councils have not identified any need for additional allotments, existing allotments represent a valuable facility, particularly in view of the trend towards increased leisure time, and are therefore covered by Policy LR1.

12.9 In accordance with Government advice, the Council will protect all such facilities from development unless specific circumstances apply. Within the development boundaries these areas have been identified on the Proposals Map and a schedule of the areas included at Appendix 4, with the exception of school playing fields which are subject to protection by separate Government guidance. Whilst it is recognised that many important areas of open space exist outside the development boundaries these areas are subject to generally restrictive countryside planning policies and are not therefore separately identified on the Proposals Map.

Policy LR1

Development proposals that would result in the loss of existing public or private playing fields, associated buildings and facilities, or open space used for informal recreation, as shown on the Proposals Map, will not be permitted. Exceptionally, permission may be granted when it can be demonstrated that:-

- (1) redevelopment of part of the site would enhance the recreational facilities available;**

(2) alternative provision of equivalent size, suitability and accessibility will be made within the locality; or

- (3) it can be demonstrated that there is an excess of such facilities in the area which would not be prejudiced by the proposed development.**

Outdoor Playing Space

12.10 In accordance with the Government's revised PPG17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation - July 2002) a local assessment of need and an audit of open space, sports and recreation facilities is presently being undertaken to establish the quantity, quality and value of open spaces and sport and recreation facilities. The revised PPG17 requires a move away from reliance on the National Playing Field Association's (NPFA) Six Acre Standard and the development local standards to reflect local needs.

12.11 Pending the completion of the assessment and audit referred to above this Plan has continued to rely on the NPFA standard, as the most appropriate basis for assessing the provision of outdoor playing space in the towns. The NPFA standard is a longstanding nationally proven tool for assessing the adequacy of outdoor playing space.

12.12 However, once the assessment and audit have been completed, the information gained will be used to set local standards and the emerging Local Development Framework.

12.13 The NPFA standard recommends that a minimum of 2.4 hectares of outdoor playing space is provided per thousand population, comprising 1.6-1.8 hectares of space for youth and adult uses (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.

12.14 Appendix 4 indicates the overall provision of outdoor playing space in Wealden's towns and shows that all fall below the NPFA recommended levels with a particular deficiency in the provision of children's play space. Consultation with the Town Councils confirms the

overall deficiency at a local level, a situation that is often emphasised by local sports clubs and organisations.

12.15 The principal requirement for youth and adult use derives from the four team sports of cricket, football, hockey and rugby. Whilst all weather pitches have been provided recently at Crowborough and Hailsham secondary schools, and have significantly improved outdoor play space facilities in the two towns, the opportunities for providing other additional outdoor pitches are limited due to the lack of sites in Town Council ownership. However, land has been allocated for the provision of further playing fields at Crowborough, Hailsham, Polegate and Uckfield with the support of the Town Councils, as described in the relevant town chapters, and playing pitches are proposed in association with the major new housing allocations at Hailsham, Polegate and Uckfield.

12.16 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, additional provision is made within many of the housing allocations and potential exists within the public open space allocations as discussed in the individual settlement chapters.

12.17 Whilst the application of the NPFA standards to rural areas is not considered appropriate, consultations carried out with the Parish Councils indicate a reasonable level of provision is achieved in many of the rural parts of the District, with most of the larger villages possessing at least one recreation ground. Buxted, Pevensey, Rotherfield, Chiddingfold, Hellingly and Hartfield are seeking new outdoor facilities and several other Parishes are seeking improvements to existing facilities. These are detailed in Appendix 4.

12.18 The need for new children's play spaces has been identified by Buxted, Chiddingfold, Cuckmere Valley, Hadlow Down, Selmeaton and Pevensey parishes and other parishes are proposing improvements to existing facilities. These are also detailed in Appendix 4.

12.19 Town and Parish Council initiatives for the provision of new or improved outdoor recreational facilities will be supported where appropriate.

Outdoor Playing Space in New Housing Developments

12.20 In line with Government guidance, it is considered essential that adequate provision for recreational open space is made within new residential developments in order to meet the recreational needs of new residents and to avoid exacerbating existing deficiencies. The Council will require developers to provide appropriate outdoor play space as an integral part of new developments in accordance with NPFA standards, including playing fields for youth and adult use, and children's play space, or where these cannot be provided on-site then a commuted payment will be required towards off-site provision elsewhere in the locality.

12.21 The Council has identified thresholds above which developers will be required to provide on-site children's play space and playing pitches, as set out in Policy LR2 below. The scale of provision should relate to the demand generated by the development and this is calculated from the number of people likely to occupy each dwelling as detailed in Appendix 4. In determining the precise requirement for any individual development, account will also be taken of the type of housing proposed, the location of the site, and the existing level and quality of local play space provision. Below these thresholds, in developments of six dwellings or more, or where the resultant play space would be too small to be practicable or to meet a local need, the Council will seek commuted payments towards the off-site provision of open space within the same Parish.

12.22 Draft supplementary planning guidance has been produced on outdoor playing space in new housing development. It is intended that this will ultimately be incorporated into the emerging Local Development Framework.

Children's Play Space

12.23 Development of 15 dwellings or more will generate sufficient demand for on-site provision when applying NPFA standards. An exception to this policy is made in the case of one bedroom units or sheltered housing or other specialist accommodation for the elderly/retired. Children's play space should be located within a short walking distance of homes, with safe and convenient pedestrian access and should be designed to minimize vandalism, avoid nuisance to neighbours and allow easy supervision.

Youth and Adult Open Space

12.24 In applying NPFA standards for youth and adult use, the population generated by 200 houses of the size and mix which has been typical of previous developments in the District would justify the provision of one full size football field and its margins. However, there may be cases where the mix and size of houses in a scheme of 200 dwellings may not justify a full size pitch. In such cases the Council may require a junior size pitch or informal kick-about area as part of the development or, alternatively, a commuted payment may be required in order to assist with the provision of a full size pitch elsewhere in the locality where this is supported by an established local need.

Policy LR2

Planning permission will be granted for new residential development only where public open space for play is provided on-site at a minimum of 2.4 hectares per 1000 population, as follows:-

Children's play space in developments of 15 or more dwellings, proportional to the standard of 0.6 – 0.8 ha per 1000 population, including an equipped area at 0.2 – 0.3 ha per 1000 population and a casual or informal play space at 0.4 – 0.5 ha per 1000 population.

Playing fields in development of 200 or more dwellings, proportional to the standard of 1.6 – 1.8 ha per 1000 population, including playing pitch provision of 1.21 ha per 1000 population.

This space should:-

- (1) in the case of children's play spaces, be integral to the overall design layout and evenly distributed around estates, in open and welcoming locations which are overlooked by dwellings and well used footways.
- (2) be properly drained, laid out, levelled, equipped and landscaped, and in the case of playing fields, with car parking and changing facilities where appropriate; and
- (3) be additional to any incidental amenity or other open space.

A capital sum or other satisfactory arrangement will be sought for long term future maintenance.

Where the housing development is below the thresholds stated above;

- (i) in the case of playing fields, where the resultant play space would be too small to be practicable or to meet an identified local need, a junior size pitch or informal kick-about area shall be provided, or alternatively, a commuted payment shall be made to the District Council towards the provision of open space elsewhere within the same Parish;
- (ii) in the case of children's play space, where the resultant play space would be too small to be practicable, a commuted payment shall be made to the District Council towards the provision of open space elsewhere within the same Parish; in either case, the requirement for a commuted payment applies to sites of six dwellings or more.

The above standards will be used in order to calculate the appropriate commuted payment for off-site provision.

Artificial Turf Pitches

12.25 Artificial turf or 'all weather' pitches 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. All weather pitches have recently been provided at the Community Colleges at Crowborough and Hailsham although the Crowborough pitch is not currently floodlit. Whilst the Council seeks to encourage further provision it recognises that floodlighting, together with increased levels of activity in the evenings, can be of particular concern in some areas. Proposals will therefore only be permitted where the amenities of adjoining occupiers and the character of the locality would not be unacceptably affected. Proposals outside development boundaries will be permitted in particular circumstances as set out in Policy LR3 below. The development of artificial turf pitches should not be at the expenses of grass pitches unless an overall benefit can be demonstrated.

Policy LR3

Proposals for the provision of artificial turf pitches will be permitted within development boundaries provided that:

- (1) The proposal does not adversely affect the character or amenity of the locality or the countryside;**
- (2) The proposal is easily accessible by a choice of means of transport including public transport, cycling, and walking; and**
- (3) The proposal does not adversely affect the amenities of nearby occupiers by reason of light intrusion, increased vehicular movement, increased level of activity or noise.**

Where a clear demand can be demonstrated, and where the proposal cannot be satisfactorily accommodated within development boundaries, artificial turf pitches will be permitted outside of development boundaries only where related to existing established facilities adjacent to the edge of settlements, and provided that the proposal meets criteria (1)-(3) above.

Control over the hours of operation may be required by condition of any planning permission.

of informal amenity space which is accessible to the public. This will include utilising the amenity potential of landscape features where they exist and providing additional informal open space in association with the development of new sites.

Policy LR4

The Council will seek the provision of informal amenity space, additional to the outdoor playing space required under Policy LR2, in all new housing developments. Existing landscape features such as trees, hedgerows, streams and ponds will be incorporated within such areas where they exist.

Indoor Leisure And Community Facilities

Existing Facilities

12.28 In general it is considered that Wealden is well provided for in terms of its leisure centre facilities, principally providing swimming pools, large sports halls and fitness facilities with 80% of the District's population now living within three miles of the public indoor leisure centres. In addition, there are a number of private indoor facilities mainly providing swimming, squash and health and fitness facilities, as well as community halls managed by a variety of public and private organisations which are used for a range of leisure and community purposes. All of these facilities, whether public or private, are valued by the local community and in the light of the planned population growth it is considered appropriate to resist development that would result in their loss. Exceptionally planning permission resulting in the loss of these facilities may be granted in the circumstances referred to in Policy LR5. The loss of facilities may also be acceptable where there is a demonstrable surplus. In such circumstances applicants will be required to submit an assessment of provision in order to demonstrate the appropriateness of the proposal.

Informal Amenity Areas

12.26 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 can include 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.

12.27 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

Policy LR5

Proposals which would result in the loss of existing indoor leisure and community facilities will not be permitted unless they are replaced with equivalent provision, either incorporated into the new development or by replacement provision in a nearby and accessible location, or it can be demonstrated that the existing facility is no longer viable.

New Facilities

12.29 Despite the existing wide range of provision, there is increasing demand for a wider range of activities. In recognition of this, as well as the lack of public transport and community expectation, the Council's leisure and cultural objectives seek a planned approach to a network of smaller scale indoor provision through schools, community halls, local clubs and commercial facilities.

12.30 Any further indoor leisure facilities should normally be located within the town or village development boundaries for sustainability and environmental reasons. Small-scale proposals may be acceptable in the countryside where they are ancillary to an existing use or where they provide a use for 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. New community halls are covered by Policy LR7.

Policy LR6

Proposals for indoor leisure facilities will be permitted outside the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, provided 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.

New Community Halls

12.31 In most parts of the District, community halls make a vital contribution to town and village life and many accommodate a range of leisure pursuits alongside more general community uses. These facilities are managed by a variety of different organisations, including Town and Parish Councils, voluntary bodies and churches. In rural areas, and to a lesser extent in urban areas, the role of community halls in meeting the local need for indoor sport and recreation facilities is important. In many rural communities, access to the towns is often restricted due to a lack of private transport or the inadequacy of public transport, and the provision of purpose-built leisure facilities is not financially viable given the small catchment population. It is therefore important that the design of new community halls should where possible take full account of their potential multi-purpose role e.g. incorporating badminton court dimensions and the provision of adequate ceiling height.

12.32 The Council recognises that new housing development can increase the demand on local community halls and the major housing allocations at Hailsham and Polegate include provision for a community hall as part of the proposed neighbourhood centres. Consultations with the Town and Parish Councils have also identified a need for new community halls at Buxted and Forest Row and several other Parishes are seeking improvements to existing facilities.

Policy LR7

Proposals for new or extended community halls will be permitted outside of development boundaries identified on the Proposals Map only where the proposed development:-

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

(4) is sited in a location easily accessible by the community that it is intended to serve.

