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Your Views

Key Questions

1 We want to hear your views on the suggestions in this document and for you to help us improve it. You may comment on any aspect of this document, but we would be particularly interested in your views on the following questions:

- Do you have any comments on the strategic approach that has been outlined in the paper?
- Do you feel we have identified the main areas of open space deficiency in the District?
- What open space needs (either new provision or improvement of existing) exist in your local area?

How to Respond

2 Please let us know your thoughts on these questions, and anything else you think about the suggestions in this paper. Your comments should be returned to the address below, or emailed to planning_policy@wycombe.gov.uk by 4th November 2005. Please use the form provided which is available on our website at www.wycombe.gov.uk/imaginethefuture, in the Imagine the Future pack, or from Beth Wiseman at:

3 Beth Wiseman
Wycombe District Council
Freepost HY120
Planning and Major Projects WDC63
Queen Victoria Road
High Wycombe
Buckinghamshire
HP11 1BB

Introduction 1

1.1 The Government's recent promotion of the planning system in the UK delivering 'Sustainable Communities' has reinforced the importance of parks and green spaces to our quality of life.

1.2 Safe and attractive open spaces, as part of an improved urban environment, improve peoples pride in where they live; lowers the fear of crime and ultimately increase community cohesion. This is linked to reductions in crime⁽⁹⁾. There are a range of social, environmental and economic policy objectives which quality parks and open spaces contribute toward.

1.3 Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and the Companion Guide *Assessing Needs and Opportunities* require Local Authorities to carry out comprehensive audits of open space in respect of quality, quantity, accessibility and value to the community.

1.4 The WOSS recently completed by consultants Scott Wilson marks the next stage in the Council's desire to achieve a better policy approach to open space, sport and recreation in the District. The study included the qualitative audit of all open spaces in the main settlements in the district. The council will continue to review the data and complete further work on developing a strategic approach.

1.5 The study represents a dramatic improvement in the knowledge the Council has for open space provision in the District. It not only identifies all known open spaces (both publicly and privately owned) in most settlements in the District but has also provided the Council with a powerful management tool. The findings will form the basis of a revised planning policy approach.

1.6 The Council has also carried out extensive research into the need for new sports development. The Leisure Needs Appraisal focussed upon the future of Wycombe Sports Centre. However, it is acknowledged that there is a wider need throughout the District for built sports facilities.

1.7 As the Council's housing strategy will focus upon intensified brownfield development within urban areas, public open space will become increasingly important. The Council should look to provide parks and open spaces that the whole community want to visit and enjoy, and that will play a key part in achieving the Community Plan's vision for the District.

1.8 This report outlines the Council's current proposals for the preparation of core strategy planning policies relating to parks and green spaces. It will also show what issues and options surround the future of major sports facilities in Wycombe.

2 Findings of the Wycombe Open Spaces Study 2005

Approach

2.1 A qualitative audit was undertaken of existing open spaces within the District. More than 600 individual sites were visited and 500 sites were the subject of either a full audit or were commented upon. Attributes were assigned to all sites including typology, accessibility, hierarchy and function.

2.2 The WOSS includes an assessment and analysis of the supply of open space within the settlements. This should be developed to form part of a Parks and Open Spaces Strategy for Wycombe.

2.3 As mentioned above, the stud has provided the Council with comprehensive data on all open spaces in the District. However, this data is dynamic (as the quantity and quality of our open spaces change) and will be regularly updated by the Council.

The existing provision of open space

2.4 The current Local Plan standard of provision (in terms of quantity) for open space in Wycombe is based upon the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) of 2.4 hectares per 1000 population.

2.5 Based on the WOSS audit information, the amount of 'formal publicly accessible' open space is 2.16 hectares per 1000 population. Although not exactly comparable with the NPFA definition for open space for sport, active recreation and children's play, this can however be used to assess how the Districts level of provision performs against this nationally applied standard.

2.6 The study shows that some towns and villages have a much greater supply than others but the study also shows there are areas, some significant in their coverage which have no locally accessible open space.

Deficiency Mapping

2.7 One of the study's key outputs is information on the distribution of parks and open spaces in the District. This data has provided a detailed picture of areas in our towns where there is an undersupply, highlighting those communities without accessible open space.

2.8 For the purpose of identifying areas of deficiency, appropriate proximity buffers and lines of severance (such as major roads, railway lines and rivers) were

applied to unrestricted local and neighbourhood parks, and other sites considered by Wycombe District Council to fulfil a recreational function.

2.9 The key deficiency areas identified at this stage include:

In **High Wycombe**:

- The Desborough Area and western part of the Town Centre;
- Parts of Hughenden Valley and Amersham Hill;
- Hazlemere; and
- Cressex and Daws Hill.

2.10 In **Marlow**:

- Areas of the town's western and eastern edges.

2.11 In **Princes Risborough**:

- Most of the southern part of the town.

2.12 The WOSS has not assessed some of the most rural areas in the District. It appears however that there are also critical areas that are deficient in open space provision within larger villages⁽ⁱ⁾.

Open spaces outside the main settlements

2.13 Rural areas in the District will need to adopt a varied approach in addressing quantitative deficiencies. It may be that each community must identify priorities for open space requirement and as such, the use of every open space is maximised.

2.14 The production of Village Design Statements in the District will help to further identify both those open spaces that will not have been identified in the WOSS and that are of value to communities. This will also help to identify where there are other needs for new open spaces/deficiencies in small rural settlements.

2.15 The lack of public parks and open spaces is equally detrimental to rural communities. However, there are a number of key considerations that should be taken into account when developing a strategic approach. In rural areas, many open spaces are owned by Parish Councils. As such, the District Council is not responsible for the maintenance of many important open spaces in these rural areas. As such, Wycombe District Council will have to work closely with Town and Parish Councils who own publicly accessible open space.

i For more details on deficiency mapping and which areas are being identified, please refer to the Wycombe District Open Spaces Study 2005 Prepared by Scott Wilson the Councils website www.wycombe.gov.uk/planning.

Findings of the Wycombe Open Spaces Study 2005 2

Quality Mapping

2.16 The other major aspect of the study has been the quality assessment of open spaces. Each open space has been comprehensively audited based on a detailed list of criteria. This has provided the Council with an accurate picture of the state of all open space in the District.

2.17 Most parts of the District have access to some form of public open space^(m). Generally, the quality of our open space is adequate. However, there is a great potential to improve the quality of these spaces and subsequently our enjoyment of them.

2.18 It is important to note that the quality audit has taken the potential of sites into account when scoring. A site may be of sufficient or possibly even good quality, but if it is judged the park or open space does not meet its potential, this is reflected in the overall score.

2.19 This information has highlighted those areas that, whilst having a variety of open spaces that are accessible, may all have poor quality scores and ultimately not meet the needs of the community.

** An Executive Summary of the Study is included as an Appendix.*

3 Built Sports Facilities in the District

3.1 The work that has been done in connection with the M40 Gateway Study and the Leisure Needs Appraisal has identified a clear need for the provision of improved facilities in High Wycombe. The Sports Centre would require significant refurbishment to meet current requirements. Instead, the Council are looking at providing a new larger and improved centre in the town, either within the M40 Gateway area or closer to the town centre.

3.2 The Leisure Needs Appraisal also highlighted requirements for new sports facilities throughout the district. The priorities identified by this work have also highlighted a need for a 6 lane 25 metre pool in Marlow (either refurbishment of the existing Court Garden Leisure Complex pool or replacement); and a new 4-court badminton/sports hall in Princes Risborough⁽ⁱ⁾.

3.3 The Causeway Stadium is the home of both Wycombe Wanderers Football Club and London Wasps Rugby Union Club.

3.4 The Causeway does not have the capacity to enable a long term future for the London Wasps at the stadium. The stadium's capacity would need to be increased to facilitate this.

3.5 Another issue concerning the future of the Causeway Stadium are the transport issues that exist. At present, there are significant traffic and parking problems on match days, exacerbated by the single access route to the stadium through the industrial estate. A comprehensive transport solution is required, which may involve improved public transport services and the management/enforcement of parking in local residential areas. These and other policy/environmental issues would need to be addressed as part of any stadium proposals.

i The calculations are based on a national 'calculator' provided by Sport England.

The WDF Core Strategy and Site Allocations 4

The Wycombe Development Framework

4.1 The Wycombe Development Framework will set a new strategic policy framework for the protection of existing, and the provision of new open space in Wycombe. The policies will also relate to wider strategic planning work and management plans.

The WDF Core Strategy

4.2 The work currently being undertaken, identifying a vision and strategic development options, may offer opportunities for securing the provision of new open space for these neighbourhoods.

4.3 Policy 2 (High Wycombe Areas of Changes) of the Wycombe Development Framework Draft Core Strategy has set out the strategic objectives for parts of the town where new development is likely to be concentrated.

4.4 The areas identified in Policy 2 are:

- High Wycombe Town Centre
- Desborough Area to Chapel Lane
- Hughenden
- M40 Gateway.

4.5 This policy sets out strategic aims and objectives for the improvement to these areas. The provision of new open spaces and/or environmental improvement is a priority of the long term visioning for these areas.

4.6 For more information on the High Wycombe Masterplan and M40 Gateway Study, please refer to the separate Background Papers produced for the Imagine the Future – Part 3. These are available on the Council website www.wycombe.gov.uk or to view at our offices in High Wycombe.

4.7 Policy 6 of the Draft Core Strategy (Environmental Assets in Town and Country) sets out the strategic approach for the future enhancement and protection of open spaces in the District.

4.8 In relation to Public Open Space, Policy 6 focuses upon:

- establish a green network, including possible identification of green wedges and corridors

- review existing green space designations
- identify priority areas for improving open space and identify where new open spaces should be provided.

4.9 The existence of this stadium in the Green Belt is now inconsistent in regard to the purposes of the Green Belt.

4.10 As a result it is proposed in the Draft Core Strategy, to remove both the stadium and adjoining car park from the Green Belt. Such a proposal would not obviate the need to find long term solutions to the transportation and parking problems associated with the stadium.

WDF Site Allocations Issues and Options

4.11 In all urban areas, we now have identified all open space. The WDF will look to provide a number of new open spaces, including through the allocation of new open spaces where possible in the Allocations Document.

4.12 It has emerged from the audits that there is potentially a large number of open spaces within the District that are not formally designated on the current Local Plan Proposals Maps. The WDF Allocations Document needs to review Green Space designations.

4.13 One of the approaches being considered is one which focuses on the enhancement of existing open space. Priorities need to be established for this. In areas where there is a quantitative deficiency, we will seek to provide new open spaces for local communities through new development*.

5 Mechanisms for Implementation

5.1 One of the key outputs of the Wycombe District Open Spaces Study 2005 has been the highly detailed level of information that has been collected on the districts existing open space provision, in respect of quality (condition and potential), quantity, and distribution.

5.2 With this, we must develop a new approach to the way in which we seek to manage and provide open space in the future. As resources for this are limited, we must ensure that funding is used as efficiently as possible.

5.3 The combined efforts of the Planning and Leisure services will develop and produce this future strategy. Based on the current level of information, the next steps are proposed to ensure that quantity and quality standards for open space are maintained and enhanced.

Open Space Management and Improvement Strategy

5.4 The findings of the WOSS, including the detailed data that has been provided through this work needs to be maintained. This data should inform the creation of a spending plan to identify and guide future improvements in open space provision within the District.

5.5 Developer Contributions will need to be linked to a clear strategy identifying the need for funding, in terms of necessary qualitative improvements and for new provision.

Developer Contributions

5.6 The Wycombe Development Framework should introduce a new approach to providing open space associated with new development, with a greater emphasis on taking financial contributions to open space provision/improvements and clear and transparent method of calculating those contributions.

5.7 The use of these funds will contribute to the future provision or enhancement of open space and will be used in a more precise and strategic way, being spent on prioritised needs. In most cases, financial contributions will be collected for enhancing the quality of the existing network of open spaces in the district. However, in areas identified as deficient in quantity, new provision will be of most importance.

Appendix - Executive Summary of the Wycombe District Open Spaces Study 2005 6

6.1 This Open Space Study for the District of Wycombe has been produced by Scott Wilson in partnership with the Council's Planning and Major Projects Directorate. The conclusions and recommendations are, except where stated, those of Scott Wilson as consultants to Wycombe District Council. The report has been prepared in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation (ODPM, July 2002) and Companion Guide (ODPM, September 2002).

6.2 This report includes an assessment and analysis of the supply of open space within the settlements and will form part of an Open Space Strategy for Wycombe District. An assessment of the demand for open space in form of public consultation still needs to be undertaken. This is required in order to support the recommendations made within this report, which may result in some amendments to the conclusions drawn for the analysis of the supply of open space, and subsequent prioritisation of projects within the Open Space Study.

6.3 The other key outputs, at this stage, are the Database and Geographical Information System (GIS) relating to the open spaces of the District. The Study has drawn upon this database in its formulation, but is designed to be capable of further interrogation and analysis into the future, and can be used as an active management tool.

6.4 These two components of the work provide the Council with a wealth of information about the local open space, sport and recreation resource and present the potential to radically improve its decision making relating to open space provision in respect of management, maintenance, and strategic planning. It also presents the opportunity to work closely with the open space provider to optimise the effective management of other open space facilities.

6.5 It should be noted, however, that this report and its findings can only give a flavour of the possible interrogation and analysis of the data. The two key outputs of the study, the database and GIS mapping system, are dynamic and will be updated regularly by members of the Council. Data and related analysis are therefore subject to change and users are advised always to use the live database and mapping to ensure that their findings are based on the most up to date information.

6.6 The Council's brief required Scott Wilson to:

- Conduct a qualitative assessment of existing open spaces in the District;
- Recommend and apply open space standards including accessibility and qualitative standards;

- Identify areas of sufficiency and deficiency;
- Provide a database to be used as a reference in the future for maintenance of open and recreation spaces;
- Provide recommendations for improvements of audited sites in respect of their quality and access; and
- Provide recommendations about policies that might be applied through the Local Development Framework.

6.7 The study has been designed to recognise the role that open spaces can play in achieving the Council's vision of a caring community, a thriving economy, a healthy environment and value for money as well as providing an attractive environment for people to live and work in.

6.8 This study has concentrated on urban areas, including the larger villages, of which eleven urban settlements have been identified. The larger settlement of High Wycombe was further subdivided into urban neighbourhoods by the application of lines of severance such as roads, rivers, the railway, large employment areas and topography. It is envisaged that these settlements areas will serve the majority of the recreational needs of the communities in the District, including the needs of most of the rural population.

6.9 A qualitative audit was undertaken of existing open spaces within the District. More than 600 individual sites were visited and 500 sites were subjected to either a full audit or commented upon. Attributes were assigned to all sites including typology, accessibility, hierarchy and function. The audit forms were typology specific and very comprehensive.

The key findings in terms of supply are:

6.10 NB: Key findings are based on Scott Wilson's audit information. As both database and GIS mapping are dynamic and subject to change findings should be confirmed by running the relevant queries on the most up-to-date information.

Quantity

6.11 The District average of Unrestricted Access open space per thousand population is 6.36ha, with wide variation occurring between settlements ranging from 1.16 ha/1000 in Marlow Bottom to 54.6 ha/1000 in Naphill and Walters Ash. In comparison with other Boroughs and Districts, the amount of open space per thousand

6 Appendix - Executive Summary of the Wycombe District Open Spaces Study 2005

compares favourably with the London Boroughs and is comparable with other authorities such as Oxford City and Redditch, but less than in Reading or Chorley.

6.12 Based on the audit information the level of Formal Unrestricted Access open space is 2.16 hectares per thousand. Although not exactly comparable with the NPFA definitions for open space for sport, active recreation and children's play, this can however be used as a guide as to how the level of provision performs against the NPFA standard of 2.4 ha/1000;

Proximity

6.13 Proximity to all unrestricted open space, irrespective of typology, is generally good across all settlement areas. However this does not take into account the function of particular types of open space.

6.14 For the purpose of identifying areas of deficiency, the appropriate proximity buffers and lines of severance were applied to unrestricted local and neighbourhood parks, and other sites considered by Wycombe District Council to fulfil a recreational function.

Quality

6.15 Analysis of the quality audits reveals that there are poor quality sites throughout the District but that there are concentrations within four settlements: South-west High Wycombe, North-west High Wycombe, South-east High Wycombe and Tylers Green. Almost three-quarters of the lowest scoring sites are formal open spaces such as parks, playgrounds and outdoor sports grounds. This is of concern as it is more usual for informal open space to score poorly due to lower levels of management. In contrast the highest scoring sites do not seem to follow any particular geographical pattern and appear to be mainly smaller open spaces such as amenity sites, civic spaces and gardens.

6.16 The method for assessing quality in Wycombe has taken into account the sites' condition and potential. Inevitably, this tends to favour small formal spaces where there is little opportunity to provide new facilities; larger open spaces tend to offer more opportunities and therefore tend to perform less well in terms of potential. In particular sport grounds and greens/ commons tend to vary in condition and do not generally fulfil their potential, while Semi-natural green spaces and green corridors have variable condition but tend to be meeting their potential.

6.17 In summary, the majority of open space with unrestricted access was found to be in good condition, but half of sites are not reaching their potential. Three key quality issues were identified:

- Play facilities – the majority of play sites visited were in poor condition, ranging from sites requiring repair and maintenance to sites that should be closed on health and safety grounds. The distribution of play sites was also found to be uneven with over provision in some areas and none in others;
- Signage - signage is either lacking or, if available, of poor quality, across most sites and this despite a corporate signage strategy; and
- Maintenance – it was found that site furniture was often in a poor state of repair and lacking in regular maintenance. There was also evidence of vandalism and graffiti in many open spaces giving an air of neglect. Fly tipping is occurring in a few sites and where it does occur is often extensive.

6.18 Settlement areas have specifically been analysed in terms of quantity, quality and proximity of open space. This includes key recommendations and priority actions for each settlement area. In general, there are variations between settlements in terms of the factors analysed and recommendations are settlement specific.

Recommendations

- Setting standards for Quantity, Quality and Proximity will need to be informed by public consultation in order to determine if the assumptions made, when analysing the supply of open space, match the public's perceptions and needs; similarly public opinion regarding quality issues also needs to be solicited;
- The recurring quality issues of poor play facilities, signage and general maintenance, should be investigated further and proposals made to address these strategically;
- Quality and condition issues might best be addressed through writing and implementing management plans for District and Neighbourhood sites, with a view to Green Flag accreditation;
- The database should be used to help to inform decisions about the improvement of sites and facilities;
- Proximity buffers and quantity requirements have been based on nationally accepted standards such as the NPFA and GLA guidance. This provides the Council with valuable information regarding

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deficiency areas in respect of open space. These standards, however, will have to be confirmed or refined through public consultation.

- Maintaining the existing quantity of open space should be used as a default position until consultation has been undertaken to determine whether the public believe there is sufficient open space. In general terms, where the existing level of provision meets the average level then resources should be directed towards site quality improvements; where there are deficiencies in the quantity of open space, then resources should be directed towards site creation or diversifying or changing uses within existing sites;
- Robust methods for the calculation of contributions for on and off-site provision of open space and commuted sums for ongoing maintenance, related to new development should be developed to secure funding for improving open space provision within Wycombe; and
- The database and GIS should be updated on a regular basis and used as an active management tool to inform decisions for open space provision and improvements.