

# **Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for open space, sport and recreation**

Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) notes set out the Government's national policies on different aspects of planning. This PPG replaces Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 17 published in 1991. The policies set out in this guidance will need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the preparation of Regional Planning Guidance (or any successor) and by local planning authorities in the preparation of development plans (or their successors); they may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications.

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### Planning Objectives

Open spaces, sport and recreation all underpin people's quality of life. Well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are therefore fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives. These include:

- **supporting an urban renaissance** - local networks of high quality and well managed and maintained open spaces, sports and recreational facilities help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe. Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by acting as 'green lungs' can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality.
- **supporting a rural renewal** - the countryside can provide opportunities for recreation and visitors can play an important role in the regeneration of the economies of rural areas. Open spaces within rural settlements and accessibility to local sports and recreational facilities contribute to the quality of life and well being of people who live in rural areas.
- **promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion** - well planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live. As a focal point for community activities, they can bring together members of deprived communities and provide opportunities for people for social interaction.
- **health and well being** - open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.
- **promoting more sustainable development** - by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities (particularly in urban areas) are easily accessible by walking and cycling and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport.

### National Planning Policies

#### Assessments Of Needs And Opportunities

1. To ensure effective planning for open space, sport and recreation it is essential that the needs of local communities are known. Local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities.

Assessments will normally be undertaken at district level, although assessments of strategic facilities should be undertaken at regional or sub-regional levels.

2. As a minimum, assessments of need should cover the differing and distinctive needs of the population for open space and built sports and recreational facilities (as outlined in the [annex](#)). The needs of those working in and visiting areas, as well as residents should also be included.

3. Local authorities should also undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use made of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs (such as charges) and opportunities for new open space and facilities ([see endnote 1](#)). Audits should consider both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of open space, sports and recreational facilities. Audits of

quality will be particularly important as they will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and maintenance.

4. Assessments and audits will allow local authorities to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. They form the starting point for establishing an effective strategy for open space, sport and recreation at the local level (tied into the local authority's Community Strategy), and for effective planning through the development of appropriate policies in plans.

5. Good quality assessments and audits, leading to clear strategies supported by effective planning policies, will provide vital tools for resolving the potential conflicts that arise between different uses and users of open space, sports and recreational facilities. The Government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and sports and recreational facilities in accordance with the paragraphs above. Good practice guidance ([see endnote 2](#)) being published in tandem with this PPG provides more detailed advice on how to undertake these assessments and audits.

### **Setting Local Standards**

6. The Government believes that open space standards are best set locally. National standards cannot cater for local circumstances, such as differing demographic profiles and the extent of existing built development in an area.

7. Local authorities should use the information gained from their assessments of needs and opportunities to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas. Local standards should include:

- i. quantitative elements (how much new provision may be needed);
- ii. a qualitative component (against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities); and
- iii. accessibility (including distance thresholds and consideration of the cost of using a facility).

8. Setting robust local standards based on assessments of need and audits of existing facilities will form the basis for redressing quantitative and qualitative deficiencies through the planning process. Standards should be included in development plans.

9. *Assessing needs and opportunities: A companion guide to PPG17* provides further guidance on setting local standards for open space, sport and recreation.

### **Maintaining An Adequate Supply Of Open Space And Sports And Recreational Facilities**

10. Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be surplus to requirements. For open space, 'surplus to requirements' should include consideration of all the functions that open space can perform. Not all open space, sport and recreational land and buildings are of equal merit and some may be available for alternative uses. In the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by a local authority, an applicant for planning permission may seek to demonstrate through an independent assessment that the land or buildings are surplus to requirements. Developers will need to consult the local community and demonstrate that their proposals are widely supported by them. [Paragraph 15](#) below applies in respect of any planning applications involving playing fields.

**11.** Open space and sports and recreational facilities that are of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans. Areas of particular quality may include:

- i. small areas of open space in urban areas that provide an important local amenity and offer recreational and play opportunities;
- ii. areas of open space that provide a community resource and can be used for informal or formal events such as religious and cultural festivals, agricultural shows and travelling fairs. Travelling fairs may also require suitable winter quarters (DoE Circular 22/91 refers); and
- iii. areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

**12.** Development of open space, sports or recreational facilities may provide an opportunity for local authorities to remedy deficiencies in provision. For example, where a local authority has identified a surplus in one type of open space or sports and recreational facility but a deficit in another type, planning conditions or obligations may be used to secure part of the development site for the type of open space or sports and recreational facility that is in deficit.

**13.** Equally, development may provide the opportunity to exchange the use of one site for another to substitute for any loss of open space, or sports or recreational facility. The new land and facility should be at least as accessible to current and potential new users, and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality. Wherever possible, the aim should be to achieve qualitative improvements to open spaces, sports and recreational facilities. Local authorities should use planning obligations or conditions to secure the exchange land, ensure any necessary works are undertaken and that the new facilities are capable of being maintained adequately through management and maintenance agreements.

**14.** Parks, recreation grounds, playing fields and allotments must not be regarded as 'previously-developed land', as defined in annex C of PPG3. Even where land does fall within the definition of 'previously-developed', its existing and potential value for recreation and other purposes should be properly assessed before development is considered.

### *Playing Fields*

**15.** In advance of an assessment of need, local authorities should give very careful consideration to any planning applications involving development on playing fields ([see endnote 3](#)). Where a robust assessment of need in accordance with this guidance has not been undertaken, planning permission for such developments should not be allowed unless:

- i. the proposed development is ancillary to the use of the site as a playing field (eg new changing rooms) and does not adversely affect the quantity or quality of pitches and their use;
- ii. the proposed development only affects land which is incapable of forming a playing pitch (or part of one);
- iii. the playing fields that would be lost as a result of the proposed development would be replaced by a playing field or fields of equivalent or better quantity and quality and in a suitable location - [see paragraph 13 above](#); or
- iv. the proposed development is for an outdoor or indoor sports facility of sufficient benefit to the development of sport to outweigh the loss of the playing field

### *Developments within Open Spaces*

**16.** The recreational quality of open spaces can be eroded by insensitive development or incremental loss of the site. In considering planning applications - either within or adjoining open space - local authorities should weigh any benefits being offered to the community against the loss of open space that will occur. Planning authorities may wish to allow small-scale structures where these would support the existing recreational uses (for example, interpretation centres, toilets, and refreshment facilities), or would provide facilities for new recreational uses. They should seek to ensure that all proposed development takes account of, and is sensitive to, the local context.

**17.** Local authorities should:

- i. avoid any erosion of recreational function and maintain or enhance the character of open spaces;
- ii. ensure that open spaces do not suffer from increased overlooking, traffic flows or other encroachment;
- iii. protect and enhance those parts of the rights of way network that might benefit open space; and
- iv. consider the impact of any development on biodiversity and nature conservation.

### *Enhancing Existing Open Space and Sport and Recreational Facilities*

**18.** Where recreational land and facilities are of poor quality or under-used, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating an absence of need in the area. Local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the value of existing facilities. Usage might be improved by better management or by capital investment to secure improvements. Planning obligations may be used where improvements are required to meet identified needs ([see paragraph 33](#)). In looking to improve existing open space and facilities, local authorities should:

- i. promote the compatibility of the uses made of open spaces and sport and recreational facilities with adjoining land uses;
- ii. encourage better accessibility of existing open spaces and sports and recreational facilities, taking account of the mobility needs in the local population; and
- iii. promote better use of open spaces and sports and recreational facilities, by the use of good design to reduce crime.

**19.** In considering applications for floodlighting, local authorities should ensure that local amenity is protected. The impact on the openness of the Green Belt, or on the character of the countryside, of floodlight towers or pylons should be a key factor in determining whether planning permission should be granted. Further guidance is contained in the companion document to this PPG.

## **Planning For New Open Space And Sports And Recreational Facilities**

### *General principles*

**20.** In identifying where to locate new areas of open space, sports and recreational facilities, local authorities should:

- i. promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for people with disabilities;
- ii. locate more intensive recreational uses in sites where they can contribute to town centre vitality and viability;
- iii. avoid any significant loss of amenity to residents, neighbouring uses or biodiversity;
- iv. improve the quality of the public realm through good design;
- v. look to provide areas of open space in commercial and industrial areas;
- vi. add to and enhance the range and quality of existing facilities;
- vii. carefully consider security and personal safety, especially for children;
- viii. meet the regeneration needs of areas, using brownfield in preference to greenfield sites;
- ix. consider the scope for using any surplus land for open space, sport or recreational use, weighing this against alternative uses;
- x. assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion; and
- xi. consider the recreational needs of visitors and tourists.

In addition to these general principles, paragraphs 21 - 32 below apply in respect of specific types of facilities or areas.

#### *Mixed-use Sport, Recreation and Leisure Facilities*

**21.** Many sporting and recreational facilities will be similar in their land use characteristics to some forms of leisure - by making intensive use of land and attracting a large number of visits. Indeed, some will be mixed with significant elements of entertainment, retail or leisure uses and will function for many hours of the day. Planning permission for such developments should only be granted where they are to be located in highly accessible locations in or adjacent to town centres, or in district or neighbourhood centres. Planning permission should not be granted for a location outside such a town centre if the resulting development would undermine the centre. Sites in central locations should be allocated where there is a high level of demand for such mixed use facilities. The guidance in PPG6 explains the principles that should be applied to the location of town centre uses.

#### *Stadia and Major Developments*

**22.** Planning permission for stadia and major sports developments which will accommodate large numbers of spectators, or which will also function as a facility for community based sports and recreation, should only be granted when they are to be located in areas with good access to public transport. Planning permission for additional facilities (such as retail and leisure uses) should not be granted for any out-of-centre developments unless they comply with the policy set out in PPG6.

#### *Local Facilities*

**23.** Local authorities should ensure that provision is made for local sports and recreational facilities (either through an increase in the number of facilities or through improvements to existing facilities) where planning permission is granted for new developments (especially housing). Planning obligations ([see paragraph 33 below](#)) should be used where appropriate to seek increased

provision of open spaces and local sports and recreational facilities, and the enhancement of existing facilities. Where local facilities will attract people from a wider catchment, especially in urban areas, planning permission should not be granted unless they are located where they will be well served by public transport.

### *Open Spaces*

**24.** In planning for new open spaces and in assessing planning applications for development, local authorities should seek opportunities to improve the local open space network, to create public open space from vacant land, and to incorporate open space within new development on previously-used land. They should also consider whether use can be made of land which is otherwise unsuitable for development, or procure public use of privately owned areas of land or sports facilities.

### *Urban Fringe Areas*

**25.** The countryside around towns provides a valuable resource for the provision of sport and recreation, particularly in situations where there is an absence of land in urban areas to meet provision. Subject to [paragraphs 27-30 below](#), local authorities should encourage the creation of sports and recreational facilities in such areas and the development of areas of managed countryside, such as country parks, community forests, and agricultural showgrounds. Where planning permission is to be granted for such land uses, local planning authorities should ensure that facilities are accessible by walking, cycling and public transport as alternatives to the use of the car.

### *Rural Areas*

**26.** In rural areas those sports and recreational facilities which are likely to attract significant numbers of participants or spectators should be located in, or on the edge of, country towns. Smaller scale facilities will be acceptable where they are located in, or adjacent to villages to meet the needs of the local community. Developments will require special justification if they are to be located in open countryside, although proposals for farm diversification involving sports and recreational activities should be given favourable consideration. All development in rural areas should be designed and sited with great care and sensitivity to its rural location.

### *Sports and Recreation Provision in Designated Areas*

**27.** Designation of areas as National Parks or Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty does not preclude the use of land for sporting and recreational activities, but noisy or other intrusive activities should be restricted to locations where they will have minimal or no impact on residents or other recreational users. National Park Authorities should work with other local authorities and with sports and recreational bodies with a view to securing new sports and recreational facilities in appropriate locations within National Parks.

**28.** In Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty local planning authorities should look to meet the demands for sporting and recreational activities where the proposals are consistent with the primary objective of conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape, and the needs of agriculture, forestry and other uses.

**29.** Planning permission for development in or near a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for temporary or permanent sporting and recreational activities, should be granted only if the permission is subject to conditions that will prevent damaging impacts on the SSSI, or if other material factors are sufficient to override nature conservation considerations.

**30.** Planning permission should be granted in Green Belts for proposals to establish or to modernise essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation where the openness of the Green Belt is maintained. Development should be the minimum necessary and non-essential facilities (eg additional function rooms or indoor leisure) should be treated as inappropriate development. Very special circumstances which outweigh the harm to the Green Belt will need to be demonstrated if such inappropriate development is to be permitted.

#### *Sport and Recreation Requiring Natural Features and Water*

**31.** Some activities (eg climbing, potholing) rely on particular natural features. Where these features exist, local authorities should recognise their actual and potential recreational value, possibly to more than the local population. Planning permission should be granted but only where the impact of sports and recreational activities on natural features can be minimised. Facilities should be planned carefully to ensure that conflicts between sport and recreational activities and other interests do not arise. In considering planning applications for development near water, local authorities should ensure that access for sport and recreation purposes is not restricted and should, where possible, be enhanced. The visual amenity, heritage and nature conservation value of water resources should also be protected.

#### *Recreational Rights of Way*

**32.** Rights of way are an important recreational facility, which local authorities should protect and enhance. Local authorities should seek opportunities to provide better facilities for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, for example by adding links to existing rights of way networks.

### **Planning Obligations**

**33.** Planning obligations should be used as a means to remedy local deficiencies in the quantity or quality of open space, sports and recreational provision. Local authorities will be justified in seeking planning obligations where the quantity or quality of provision is inadequate or under threat, or where new development increases local needs. It is essential that local authorities have undertaken detailed assessments of needs and audits of existing facilities, and set appropriate local standards in order to justify planning obligations. Further advice to authorities on seeking planning obligations for open space, sports and recreational facilities is contained in the good practice guide associated with this guidance ([see endnote 4](#)).

## **Annex : Definitions**

### ***Open Space***

**1.** Open space is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground. However, in applying the policies in this Guidance, open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity ([see paragraph 3\(vi\)](#) below).

**2.** The following typology illustrates the broad range of open spaces that may be of public value:

- i. parks and gardens - including urban parks, country parks and formal gardens;

- ii. natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces - including woodlands, urban forestry, scrub, grasslands (eg downlands, commons and meadows) wetlands, open and running water, wastelands and derelict open land and rock areas (eg cliffs, quarries and pits);
- iii. green corridors - including river and canal banks, cycleways, and rights of way;
- iv. outdoor sports facilities (with natural or artificial surfaces and either publicly or privately owned) - including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks, school and other institutional playing fields, and other outdoor sports areas;
- v. amenity greenspace (most commonly, but not exclusively in housing areas) - including informal recreation spaces, greenspaces in and around housing, domestic gardens and village greens;
- vi. provision for children and teenagers - including play areas, skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops, and other more informal areas (eg 'hanging out' areas, teenage shelters);
- vii. allotments, community gardens, and city (urban) farms;
- viii. cemeteries and churchyards;
- ix. accessible countryside in urban fringe areas; and
- x. civic spaces, including civic and market squares, and other hard surfaced areas designed for pedestrians;

This typology, or variations of it, should be used by local authorities when preparing assessments of need and audits of existing open space and recreational facilities.

**3.** Local authorities should also recognise that most areas of open space can perform multiple functions. They should take account of the various functions of open space when applying the policies in this document. These include:

- i. strategic functions: defining and separating urban areas; better linking of town and country; and providing for recreational needs over a wide area;
- ii. urban quality: helping to support regeneration and improving quality of life for communities by providing visually attractive green spaces close to where people live;
- iii. promoting health and well-being: providing opportunities to people of all ages for informal recreation, or to walk, cycle or ride within parks and open spaces or along paths, bridleways and canal banks. Allotments may provide physical exercise and other health benefits;
- iv. havens and habitats for flora and fauna: sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another and may contribute towards achieving objectives set out in local biodiversity action plans;
- v. as a community resource: as a place for congregating and for holding community events, religious festivals, fêtes and travelling fairs; and,
- vi. as a visual amenity: even without public access, people enjoy having open space near to them to provide an outlook, variety in the urban scene, or as a positive element in the landscape.

### ***Sport And Recreation***

4. Sport and recreation is not formally defined for the purposes of this PPG. With the exception of limited cases where the policies are specific to sporting activities (eg those for location of stadia), policies are generic and should be applied to all forms of sport and recreational activities.

5. For the purposes of assessments of need and audits of existing built facilities for sport and recreation, local authorities should use a typology which includes swimming pools, indoor sports halls and leisure centres, indoor bowls centres, indoor tennis centres, ice rinks, community centres, and village halls.

### **Endnotes**

1. The Annex to this statement provides further guidance on the use of these terms

2. ODPM: *Assessing needs and opportunities: A companion guide to PPG17*

3. As defined in *Statutory Instrument 1996 No.1817* which amends the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995(b). This amendment requires local planning authorities to consult Sport England about developments that affect land used as playing fields.

4. ODPM: *Assessing needs and opportunities: A companion guide to PPG17*

Published 24 July 2002