

Scrutiny committee report



Report of Head of Corporate Strategy and Head of Planning

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Recreational Space, Local Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Study Reports

Recommendation

The committee is invited to:

- comment upon the draft Recreational Space, Local Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Study reports
- make recommendations to the cabinet members for planning policy and leisure for any alterations to the draft reports prior to their publication alongside the preferred options consultation on the Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Purpose of Report

1. To report to Scrutiny Committee on the draft Playing Pitch, Local Leisure Facilities and Open Space evidence studies to support the Local Plan 2031. The draft reports have been published on the Council website. The reports take into account feedback following consultation with stakeholders including Town and Parishes, Sport England and other National Governing Bodies on the quality and quantity of facilities and future requirements.

2. The Council is currently preparing the Local Plan 2031 Part 2 that will contain detailed development management policies to complement the strategic policies in the recently adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1. A number of policies in the Local Plan 2011, relating to leisure and open space will also remain saved until the adoption of Local Plan 2031 Part 2. These reports will assist the Planning Policy Team in reviewing the saved policies from the Local Plan 2011.
3. Additionally, the reports set out updated planning standards that will replace those standards set out in the adopted Open Space, Sport and Recreation SPD. These standards are to be contained within a Developer Contributions SPD that is currently out for public consultation alongside the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).
4. The reports will form part of the Council's evidence base to support policy development in the Local Plan 2031, the development of the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and, if appropriate, a wider Leisure Strategy for the Vale of White Horse District to address areas of deficiencies and identify opportunities for new provision of leisure facilities.

Strategic Objectives

5. The publication of the leisure evidence base studies support the Council's strategic objectives by supporting the delivery of infrastructure and sustainable communities and wellbeing. :

Background

6. The need to assess current open space, sports and recreation facilities and to identify opportunities for new provision is clearly set out in national policy and guidance, e.g. the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG).
7. When preparing Local Plans, the Council is required, under paragraph 73 of the NPPF, to produce planning policies that are based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. National policy states that the assessment should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits, or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area.
8. Further guidance is set out in the NPPG, which requires Councils to take into account open space in planning for new development and when considering proposals that may affect existing open spaces.
9. Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils invited proposals for the provision of a Joint Recreational Space, Local Leisure Facilities and Playing Pitch Study. Following a procurement process, Nortoft were commissioned as consultants to prepare and produce Playing Pitches, Open Spaces and Local Leisure Facilities Reports.
10. The reports contain factual information and background evidence to influence the development of planning policies, related to open space, sport, leisure and recreation in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

11. In May 2013, Scrutiny considered the Leisure and Sports Facilities Study 2031 – 2031.¹ This focused on the existing provision and future needs, including sports halls, swimming pools, artificial grass pitches, health and fitness, indoor bowls, indoor tennis and athletics tracks. Scrutiny will recall that, following on from this study, further work would be commissioned (by Nortoft) to produce the following remaining studies::

- Playing Pitch Study (artificial grass pitches and grass pitches including cricket, football and rugby union). To be undertaken in line with current best practice and national guidance, including Sport England’s Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance, published in October 2013.²
- Local Leisure Facilities (including village and community halls, outdoor bowls and outdoor tennis). To be undertaken in line with current best practice and national guidance.
- Open Spaces Report (including parks and gardens, amenity green space, equipped children’s play areas and young people’s space and allotments). To be undertaken in line with current best practice and national guidance.

12. These studies will be used as part of the evidence base to support the production of planning policies related to sport, leisure and recreation in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

13. With proposed major housing growth planned around Abingdon, Didcot, Faringdon, Grove, Wantage and Harwell in the Local Plan 2031 Part 1, together with other smaller areas of growth scattered across the district, the aims of the assessment included the need to:

- identify the future need for recreational space, local leisure facilities and playing pitches to 2031 to ensure there is adequate provision for the forecast population of the Vale of White Horse
- update existing information on both the supply and demand for recreational space, local leisure facilities and playing pitches taking into account the current demand for and use of existing facilities, as well as the needs and aspirations of local communities
- analyse the adequacy of current provision to meet both current and future demand
- identify whether any deficiencies exist and/or whether any provision is surplus to requirements, or whether there is spare capacity, including where there is any latent demand for facilities
- develop local standards, based on both the existing and future supply and demand identified, and reflecting both qualitative and quantitative issues following consultation with key stakeholders
- provide evidence to inform and support local plan policies
- identify opportunities to provide new facilities, and enhance and protect existing facilities

¹<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/java/support/Main.jsp?MODULE=FolderView&ID=627981333&CODE=4589D59B5ACF9D9B49FAD25E9C0D215F&NAME=13+COM+-+Communities%2C+Services+and+Recreation&REF=Local%20Plan%202031%20Part%201%20Examination%20Library>

² <https://www.sportengland.org/facilities-planning/planning-for-sport/planning-tools-and-guidance/playing-pitch-strategy-guidance/>

- identify priorities for the development of recreational space, local leisure facilities and playing pitches
- propose a policy approach to recreational space, local leisure facilities and playing pitches for inclusion in the Local Plan 2031, including how development of these facilities can be addressed through section 106 (S106) agreements and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)

14. By reviewing the existing provision of facilities across the district and the future requirements arising from population growth up until 2031, the evidence studies prioritise improvements to existing facilities and future facilities for which contributions may be sought from section 106 (s106) and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). The outputs of this assessment will feed into the development of the Council's Developer Contributions SPD.

Summary of content

15. The consultants developed an understanding of the district and reviewed national, regional and local strategies and priorities for sport and facility development, whilst undertaking an analysis of current participation levels in sport and physical activity.

16. The needs assessment for each sports facility type was made up of a number of elements including:

- theoretical demand for facilities based on various modelling tools
- site audits
- consultation responses from key stakeholders, including Towns and Parishes, local clubs and local leagues
- issues associated with facility accessibility and quality
- anticipated population forecasts
- National Governing Body of sport strategic priorities.

17. To inform the assessments, the consultants used local audit information and a number of methods of modelling (depending on what is appropriate for each type of facility) that included:

- Sport England's Facility Planning Model (FPM) models data for the district and provides an up-to-date baseline position of the adequacy of the sports facilities supply in relation to artificial grass pitches
- Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy guidance sets out the required approach towards modelling of grass pitch sports, using Team Generation Rates (TGR), the temporal demand for the sport (the number of matches at peak time), and the availability of pitches of the required size
- future needs assessment using demographic breakdown analysis and Sport England's market segmentation tools
- updates to requirements for sports facilities to 2031 using the Council's adopted standards contained in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation Future Provision Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) published in 2008.
- a review of some of the funding applications for sports facility improvements recently made and some other club/site-specific issues known to the Council.

Key outputs

PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY

18. The Playing Pitch Strategy was formally agreed by Sport England and National Governing Bodies in October 2015.
19. The Strategy followed Sport England's Playing Pitch Strategy Guidance (2013) and consultation was undertaken with National Governing Bodies using the questionnaires contained within this guidance.
20. The assessment has also included site visits for each playing pitch located in the district. The assessment took into account the quantity, quality and accessibility of each playing pitch facility.
21. The development of the strategy has been informed by consultation and continuous engagement with local clubs and leagues in the district, Sport England and National Governing Bodies, including the Football Association, Rugby Football Union and England Hockey.
22. In addition to this engagement, the report has also taken into account cross-boundary movement beyond the administrative boundaries of the district, for example, facilities located within Oxford City and South Oxfordshire.
23. Following consultation with these stakeholders, the strategy has taken into account the issues and findings from the consultation, to identify specific sites where improvements to provision, or the provision of new facilities, should be delivered, with a particular focus on the strategic allocations in the recently adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1.
24. The report recommends the amount of and type of pitches to be provided for on or off-site where appropriate. The consultants have also developed planning standards for each typology that are recommended to be included in planning policies for the council's Local Plan 2031. The recommendations set out specific standards for playing pitches (**Playing Pitch Strategy Figures 73 and 74**)

LOCAL LEISURE FACILITIES STUDY

25. The Local Leisure Facilities Study considers local leisure facilities in the Vale of White Horse for the period up to 2031, including village and community halls, outdoor bowls and outdoor tennis facilities.
26. Due to the nature of the facilities assessed, two different approaches have been taken for the analysis by sub-area. Firstly, village hall facilities have been assessed against the Settlement Hierarchy in the recently adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 as they exist at a local level. Finally, outdoor bowls and outdoor tennis facilities have been assessed in relation to sub-area as they affect a wider catchment.
27. The consultants carried out a number of quantitative and qualitative methods to undertake an analysis, which included an audit to assess the quality of the existing local leisure facilities, consultation and engagement with town and parishes, National Governing Bodies to identify specific improvements and/or future requirements for local leisure facilities.

28. The Local Leisure Facilities assessment is based on the need of the existing communities in the Vale of White Horse, and also takes into account the impact of the strategic housing allocations in the recently adopted Local Plan 2031 Part 1 and other development proposals. The reports sets out recommendations for specific standards for local leisure facilities (**Local Leisure Facilities Study Figure 16**).

OPEN SPACES REPORT

29. The Open Spaces Report assess the current standards and policies in relation to existing open space and the provision of new open space in the district. The report includes the following typologies: Parks and Gardens, Amenity Green Space, Allotments and Children's Play and Youth Provision.

30. The consultants carried out a number of methods to assess the quantity and accessibility of open space provision in comparison with the Fields in Trust recommended standards. An audit of each recognised open space in the district was undertaken to determine their quality. This was assessed against the Green Flag criteria for Parks and Gardens and Amenity Green Space, and based on current and best practice for Children's Play and Youth Provision.

31. The report sets out recommendations for specific standards for open space (**Open Spaces Report Figure 39**). In particular a combined quantity standard for Parks and Gardens and Amenity Green Space is proposed by the consultants as this will continue to follow current practice by the Council to assess planning applications for development.

32. The report also recommends that the Council continues to require developers to provide 15per cent of the residential area of a major development as public open space.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

33. The study will be reviewed at least annually to help maintain the momentum and commitment to its implementation. This will also ensure that the supply and demand information is kept relevant and up to date. If significant changes occur, an interim update will be undertaken.

34. The consultants recommend that a full review of the study should be undertaken within five years to take account of:

- anticipated housing growth within the district and on the boundaries
- general changes in participation and attractiveness of individual sports
- technical changes to sport facility requirements
- the development of new or loss of existing facilities
- facilities developed for or lost to communities within neighbouring local authorities
- cross-boundary co-ordination between local authorities
- facility investment decisions by the Council and its partners.

Financial Implications

35. The strategy prioritises future leisure requirements to inform developer contributions from s106 agreements and CIL contributions. It is not necessarily a

commitment to deliver those priorities and does not mean that the Council will take responsibility for more facilities, or will automatically make additional funds available to assist other bodies to provide new or improved facilities.

Legal Implications

36. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

Risk management

37. The reports related to open space, leisure and recreation provide evidence to support the development of planning policies in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031.

38. The reports also provide the background evidence that is required to justify the need for leisure facility projects to be funded from s106 and CIL contributions. Without this evidence, there may be a risk that developers challenge the need to make funding provision for leisure facilities.

39. Currently, it is unclear when the funding from s106 / CIL to identify leisure facility projects will be available, as the monies are generally released upon the completion of a specified number of homes. The Council will continue to communicate with local organisations to manage expectations and ensure that they are made aware of the likely timescales for the release of any such funding.

40. The work on producing these evidence bases has provided the opportunity for town and parishes and local sports clubs to identify any specific needs and deficiencies for facilities located within their town and/or parish. This is likely to result in pressure on the Council to make financial resources available (through the capital community grants scheme and the capital programme) to improve the current level of provision.

41. Having identified prioritised projects, it is important to manage expectations. There is no guarantee that any of these projects will take place and there is no commitment from the Vale Council to fund projects directly.

Other Implications

42. There are no other implications.

Conclusion

43. The development of these reports has been informed by feedback from the consultation process and engagement with key stakeholders including for example town and parishes and National Governing Bodies.

44. The Recreational Space, Playing Pitches and Local Leisure Facilities Report, once published, will be a vital tool to assist the Council in developing planning policies to support the preparation and production of the Local Plan 2031 (Part 1 and Part 2). Notwithstanding this, the reports also provide the Council with a list of priorities for which section 106 and CIL contributions can be sought towards the provision of such facilities. This background evidence will help feed into the Developer Contributions SPD and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan that will support the Local Plan 2031 Part 2.

Background Papers

- corporate plan 2016-2020
- community strategy (2008-2016)
- supplementary planning document (SPD) – open space, sport and recreation future provisions (2008)
- Vale of White Horse leisure facilities strategy (2014)
- Sport England's [playing pitch strategy guidance](#)