

Report to the LDF Cabinet Committee

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Date of meeting: 15 March 2010



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leader
Subject: PPG17 Open Space Assessment
Responsible Officer: Lewis McGann (01992 564493).
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Members note the initial work completed towards the Council's PPG17 Open Space Assessment.**
- (2) That Members approve for the remainder of the Council's PPG17 Open Space Assessment to be undertaken externally by consultants.**

Executive Summary:

Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) currently requires all Local Authorities to undertake an 'assessment of local need' in order to ensure that there is adequate provision of accessible, high quality open spaces, sport and recreation facilities within each Local Authority to meet the needs of local communities and visitors.

The Forward Planning team has therefore begun work on the Council's own PPG17 'Open Space Assessment'. The completed assessment will be used to inform the Council's approach when considering preparation of the Local Development Framework and planning applications:

- For new residential development, which is likely to generate demand for access, to and use of open space, sport and recreation facilities;
- For development of open space in Epping Forest District, whether it is in public or private ownership

Progress with the Council's 'Open Space Assessment' has now reached a critical stage. A large amount of work for the study still needs to be completed whilst the Forward Planning team must also contend with the strict timetable now in place for the production of the Council's Core Strategy. Officers therefore propose that this piece of work is completed by a suitably qualified and experienced external organisation. Given the importance of this decision in terms of team resources, officers therefore feel it is appropriate that Members are aware of the situation and approve of the option being taken.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To ensure that the Council's Planning Policy Guidance 17 (PPG17) 'Open Space Assessment' is fit for purpose and makes the best use of available time, financial and staff resources, thus minimising the risk of any potential knock on effects to the Council's Local

Development Framework timetable.

Other Options for Action:

To undertake the Council's Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) Open Space Assessment in-house.

Report:

Background

1. Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) states that well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation are fundamental to delivering broader government objectives, which include:

- Supporting an urban renaissance;
- Supporting a rural renewal;
- Promotion of social inclusion;
- Community cohesion;
- Health and well being; and
- Promoting more sustainable development.

2. Open space, sport and recreation facilities are crucial to delivering many of the planning system's aims. For this reason, all local authorities in England are required to undertake a 'Open Space Assessment' in accordance with PPG17. Producing such an assessment should ultimately ensure that each Local Authority offers adequate accessible, high quality open space, to meet the needs of local communities and visitors.

3. Government's Companion Guide to PPG17 (2002) suggests a five step process for each Local Authority to follow, to complete an Open Space Assessment. Whilst this guidance does not have to be strictly adhered to, the steps set a clear pathway to producing an effective assessment. These steps are:

- Step 1 - Auditing Local Provision: To review the amount, distribution and quality of existing provision within the District;
- Step 2 - Identifying Local Need: To identify where there is a need for more, or better, provision and the types of enhancement which will benefit existing facilities and spaces most (achieved through local consultation);
- Step 3 - Setting Provision Standards: To suggest appropriate provision standards for the Council to use as part of the planning process;
- Step 4 - Applying Provision Standards: To directly assess local open space provision standards and suggest how to tackle any key issues relating to open space, space and recreation provision facing the Council and its partners which may arise from this; and
- Step 5 Drafting Policies: To recommend strategic priorities for the future.

4. A completed 'Open Space Assessment' will form a vital part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) Evidence Base, and will enable the Council to:

(a) provide data to help create transparent planning policies that can be used to inform planning decisions and appeals and guide future provision within the District; and

(b) make informed decisions and develop future planning policy for the emerging LDF.

5. In the addition to this, the information gathered as part of the overall process will also

likely prove valuable to other departments of the Council who will be able to use the evidence collected in any relevant studies which they are currently undertaking. Potential examples of this could include any future refreshes of the Council's Playing Pitch Strategy (2007) and Play Strategy (2007).

6. The Forward Planning team intend, therefore, that the PPG17 Open Space Assessment will broadly comply with this PPG17 guidance. The ultimate objective of the assessment will be to produce new policy which sets out quantity, quality and accessibility standards for on-site open space provision, or the level of contribution towards off-site provision, expected from developers.

Progress To Date

7. The Forward Planning team has been working intermittently on the Council's Open Space Assessment since 2007, during which time a comprehensive audit of Open Space, Sport and Recreation Facilities within the District has been undertaken. This audit work forms 'Step 1' of the overall Open Space Assessment and was achieved through the following process:

(a) Establishment of the types of open space (typologies) to be considered within the auditing process. Decided upon through studying of Government Guidance and other Local Authority examples of best practice and discussion between Forward Planning team officers;

(b) Identification of the number and location of sites of open space to be included in the auditing process. Achieved through discussions with all 24 local parish councils and fellow officers, including those from leisure services;

(c) Descriptive qualitative assessment and photographing of all sites. Achieved through visits to every site with potential to be classified under one of the selected typologies;

(d) Mapping all the qualifying sites on the Council's (GIS) mapping systems; and

(e) Reviewing the entire process to make sure no sites had been overlooked or included when they didn't meet the qualification criteria highlighted in the Government guidance. Also, to make sure that site assessments had been written accurately and mapped correctly. Achieved through further consultation with all parish councils, and fellow officers as well as individually.

8. In total, 462 sites were audited across the entire District and mapped, across 10 separate typologies. These typologies are as follows:

Allotments;
Cemeteries and Graveyards;
Formal Playing Pitches;
Alternative Sites For Sport;
Informal Recreation Grounds;
Children's Playgrounds;
Indoor Facilities For High Levels Of Use;
Community Centres and Village Halls;
Managed Open Space with Public Access; and
Woodland and Semi-Natural Open Space with Public Access.

Work Remaining

9. ___ The Forward Planning team has now reached an important junction in the production of

— the Council's PPG17 Open Space Assessment. - Four steps of the assessment process still need to be completed, and - together these will form a significant amount of work, much of which is particularly technical and complex. The team's experience in this field of work meanwhile is limited to the audit work which has already been completed and there is nobody else in the Council with the required expertise to help ensure that the entire project is completed correctly. No local provision standards for any type of open space have ever been set through planning policy within the District and there are no consistently applied national standards to adhere to; therefore it is vital that our work on potential local provision standards is thorough and conclusive.

10. ___ In order to help identify a suitable methodology to undertake the remaining four steps of

— the study, officers recently met with Sport England, who have considerable experience in producing such assessments, and in providing support to local authorities undertaking them. With their guidance, officers were able to gain a better understanding of what the remaining steps will entail and how these could be most effectively
— completed.

11. ___ It will firstly be necessary to review the audit work which has so far been undertaken.

- Sport England felt this work would be more useful in assisting with the latter stages of the Assessment if a scoring matrix was included with each individually audited site. This
— will then make it easier to contrast sites against one another to identify any deficiencies
— or surpluses in open space provision throughout the District.

12. ___ Step 2 of the Open Space Assessment process requires undertaking local consultation,

— and this stage will be particularly important given the current focus on the Localism
— Agenda. A lack of engagement in this process would make it difficult to identify local needs properly, and would defeat the purpose of the assessment. Consultation with the local population should identify the following:

(-a) ___ — Local people's attitudes to existing provision;

(-b) ___ — Local expectation and need – this is nearly always affected by location, quantity
- and quality of existing provision; and

(-c) ___ — A qualitative 'vision' for the type of open space, sport or recreation facilities which communities want to see in their areas. Such a vision however should be
— made as realistic as possible.

13. ___ When assessing people's attitudes to existing provision, PPG17 highlights three simple

— tests:-

(i) ~~-a~~ ___ — Can those who wish to use the various types of open space, sport and recreation facilities access them, should they wish to do so? If not, why not? (E.g. too far away,
— too high cost, etc);

(ii) ~~-b~~ ___ — If accessible, do they meet users' needs when they get there? If not, why not?;
and
-e

(iii) ~~Do~~ users find them enjoyable and worthwhile? Why? If not, why not?

14. ~~In terms of the consultation methods used, this will largely be dependent on time and cost resources. At the same time however, any local consultation undertaken will need to be as thorough and detailed as possible in order to ensure the evidence that is collected is robust. Government guidance does not advocate any particular methods of consultation whilst examples of PPG17 local consultations undertaken by other Local Authorities show considerable differences in their scope and level of detail. It will therefore be necessary for our local consultation methodology to balance all of these issues whilst being tailored to identify the specific open space needs and demands/surpluses and deficiencies of the District. The proposed methodology that is ultimately chosen to undertake this stage of the assessment will form a key part of the criteria for the consultant selection process.~~

15. ~~The third step will then be to identify quantity, quality and accessibility provision standards for each of the highlighted typologies. These standards should be based upon the key themes emerging from the consultation work, in addition to the findings of the Open Space audit. The fourth step sees these standards applied to the data collected during the audit, from which it should then be possible to identify any unmet need as one of the following:~~

(a) ~~areas outside the distance threshold of existing facilities or spaces;~~

(b) ~~areas within the distance threshold of existing provision where there is a quantitative deficiency in provision; or~~

(c) ~~existing facilities or spaces that do not meet the relevant quality standard.~~

16. ~~The final step will be for the Forward Planning team to use the data produced from the fourth step of the assessment to draft specific open space, sport and recreation policies. These will provide a strategic framework for the planning, delivery, management and monitoring of open space, sport and recreation facilities within the District. This strategic framework, in accordance with PPG17 guidance, will identify:~~

- ~~a) existing provision to be protected;~~
- ~~b) existing provision to be enhanced;~~
- ~~c) existing provision to be relocated in order to meet local needs more effectively or make better overall use of land and proposals for new provision;~~ and;
- ~~d) identify proposals for new provision.~~

17. ~~To put the remaining work left to do for the project into context, experience in (Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council) has shown that it took a dedicated officer over one and a half years, working almost solely on that project, to complete their Open Space Assessment from start to finish. These sort of resources are not available within the Forward Planning team with officers already a senior staff member short and also in the process of drafting the Core Planning Strategy Issues and Options document. Attempting to complete the Open Space Assessment in-house would therefore result in the further delay of the production of this document and would also have knock-on consequences to the overall LDF delivery timetable.~~

18. ~~Given the very significant amount of work which remains to be completed for the~~

— Council's Open Space Assessment, and the lack of experience within the Council in
— completing such a comprehensive piece of technical work, officers therefore feel that it
— would be a better use of resources if the remainder of the study was tendered to a
— consultancy firm. This would see the selected consultants completing the study up to and
— including step 4 of the process, with officers then using the acquired information to draft
— policies to be implemented into the Council's Core Planning Strategy.

19. ___ Officers furthermore are confident that the scoring matrix required as part of the initial
— audit work can be completed in-house before the assessment is passed on to
— consultants. ¶ The auditing stage is by far the most time consuming part of the
assessment
— and as a result the most expensive to cover in terms of consultancy fees. Undertaking
— this step of the assessment in-house should therefore see a significant reduction in the
— overall costs of out-sourcing this piece of work.

20. ___ Whilst officers are confident that employing consultants at this stage is the best option
— to assure the timely completion of this important study, it is felt that Members should
— be consulted with to provide a second opinion, particularly given the important resource
— implications that a decision either way will have on the Forward Planning team and the
— Council overall.

Resource Implications:

An allocation of £20,000 for this work was included in the original estimates for work related to the LDF. This money is still available within the LDF budget, therefore no additional funding is sought at this time.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Local consultation required under Government guidance for PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The study will directly lead to the provision of adequate amounts of various high quality green open spaces, wherever unmet deficits in provision are identified within the District.

Consultation Undertaken:

None so far. Local consultation required under Government guidance for PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

Background Papers:

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2002), *Planning Policy Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) (2003), *Assessing Needs and Opportunities: A companion Guide to PPG17*.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The undertaking of a PPG17 Open Space Assessment is required in order to ensure that there is adequate provision of accessible, high quality open spaces, sport and recreation facilities in all local areas to meet the needs of local communities and visitors. Not providing such an assessment in Epping Forest District would potentially see the development and degradation of important local open spaces and less of a response (if any) to local open space needs and desires. Undertaking this work places the Council in a much stronger position in terms of creating, preserving and improving important local open spaces and thus improves local quality of life.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? ~~Yes~~ No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? ~~Yes~~ N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

The undertaking of a PPG17 Open Space Assessment could potentially impact positively on equality issues through identifying and then seeking to address any areas of low quantity and quality open space provision. People throughout the District should have an equal opportunity in accessing various types of Open Space across the District and this assessment will seek to make this a reality.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?

The potential positive impacts of the study will not be limited to any one particular group. The focus instead is to ensure that equal access to adequate amounts of high quality open space is achieved throughout the District. Those impacted by the study will therefore be those persons who currently do not have that privilege.