

<b>11.0</b>	<b>Sport, Outdoor Recreation and Community Facilities</b>	<b>Page</b>
11.1	Introduction	118
11.2	Sport	118
11.3	Public Open Space	121
11.4	Allotments	122
11.5	Footpaths and Bridleways	123
11.6	Waterways	125
11.7	Community Facilities	126

## 11.1 Introduction

11.1.1 This section covers organised sport (whether for participants or spectators), leisure activities such as walking and cultivating allotments, and community facilities.

11.1.2 Large areas of Oxford are used for this type of recreation. It makes an important contribution to people's enjoyment of life and general sense of well being, especially with increased amounts of leisure time, and an increasing older population.

11.1.3 The City Council's planning policy towards recreation is based on three principles:

- seeking to protect existing facilities, as very little land is available for replacement facilities;
- wherever possible seeking to provide, or encourage others to create, new recreational facilities; and
- improving access to such facilities, in terms of geography, and in terms of social inclusion, disability and income.

11.1.4 The City Council has commissioned assessments of green space, indoor and outdoor sport facilities provision in Oxford. The City Council will be using these assessments to formulate local standards. These assessments will therefore provide useful background information when applying the policies in this Section and the policies on Open Space Provision (HS.22 and HS.23) in Section 7.0: Housing Policies.

## 11.2 Sport

### Indoor Sport

11.2.1 Oxford's main public indoor sports facilities are the Oxford Ice Rink, Temple Cowley Pools, Ferry Sports Centre, and Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre. There are several smaller facilities, including the swimming pools at Blackbird Leys and Peers School.

11.2.2 Other facilities, mainly in schools and colleges, provide an important recreational resource. Some of these are available to the general public at specific times, such as St. Edward's School's sports, health and fitness centre and the Oxford University and Oxford Brookes sports centres. The City Council will protect indoor sports facilities.

#### **POLICY SR.1 - PROTECTION OF INDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that involves the loss of existing indoor sports facilities, except where provision is made for an equivalent or improved replacement of the existing facilities on site, or in another equally accessible and suitable location.

### Open Air Sports

11.2.3 Oxford possesses many playing fields and other areas for open air-sports, such as tennis courts. These are an important recreational resource requiring protection and, where possible, enhancement by the provision of better facilities. The City Council's assessment indicates that in terms of the National Playing Field Association's Standards, there is a shortfall in the overall area of playing fields accessible to the general public. This is mainly because many outdoor sports areas are owned by Colleges or private schools and are not necessarily available for public use.

11.2.4 The City Council considers that most outdoor sports areas are also of special significance for their amenity value and their contribution to the green space of the urban environment. This applies equally to public and private areas.

11.2.5 Therefore, the City Council will resist any overall loss in outdoor sports provision in Oxford. This applies to any proposal that results in losing part of a sports facility, with the result that the facility ceases to be viable, or can only operate at a significantly lower level.

11.2.6 The City Council will only grant permission for the development of a school playing field where it is satisfied that the local education authority have investigated and established that the site will not be required in the longer term for school or community use, and it does not provide an important green space (visual or amenity) for local residents.

11.2.7 Exceptions to the normal policy of protection will be considered only where alternative provision can be made of equivalent or improved community benefit in terms of size, utility and access, and if loss of the site would not lead to a shortage of recreation or amenity space in the local area. In suitable circumstances, the alternative provision could be in the form of significant improvements to existing outdoor sports facilities, such as the provision of changing facilities, improved drainage or an all-weather surface, which would enable it to be more intensively used as an all-weather facility.

#### **POLICY SR.2 - PROTECTION OF OPEN AIR SPORTS FACILITIES**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would result in the loss of open-air sports facilities, including school playing fields, where there is a need for the facility to be retained in its current location, or the open area provides an important green space for local residents.

Where this is not the case, planning permission will only be granted where there is no need at all for the facility for the purposes of open space, sport or recreation, or where:

- a. there is a need for the development;
- b. there are no alternative non-greenfield sites; and
- c. the facility can be replaced by either:
  - i. providing an equivalent or improved replacement facility; or
  - ii. upgrading an existing facility.

Open-air sports facilities are identified on the Proposals Map.

#### **New Indoor and Open Air Facilities**

11.2.8 It is important to provide new facilities where there are gaps in existing provision, and to improve existing facilities where there is the opportunity to do so. The City Council will

support proposals for new sports facilities provided they are consistent with other environmental policies contained in this Plan.

11.2.9 Section 14.0, Development Sites, gives details of two sites proposed for new sporting facilities:

- Bayswater School, Barton - an indoor swimming pool; and
- Oxford Road, Horspath - a Centre of Excellence for cricket and rugby.

11.2.10 New outdoor sports facilities are likely to be located outside the main built-up areas and may attract large numbers of people. The City Council will seek to ensure that measures are implemented to ensure that they are realistically accessible by walking and cycling. In addition, more heavily used sports facilities will need to be well served by public transport. Policy HS.22 in Section 7.0, Housing Policies, deals with the contributions that will be sought for local sports facilities.

11.2.11 Where sports facilities are provided by the private sector, the City Council will seek community use through sharing schemes and joint user agreements.

#### **POLICY SR.3 - NEW INDOOR AND OPEN AIR SPORTS FACILITIES**

Planning permission will be granted for the provision and improvement of indoor and outdoor sports facilities, subject to the appropriateness of their scale, siting, design and location.

The City Council will seek public access to private and institutional facilities through sharing schemes and joint user agreements. This will be secured through a planning condition or a planning obligation.

New sports facilities must be realistically accessible by walking and cycling. Heavily used facilities must be well served by public transport.

11.2.12 There is also the opportunity to create new outdoor facilities on an area of former allotments on the Abingdon Road. Significant built or hard-surfaced areas are not considered appropriate on this site, as it occupies a prominent position in the green wedge adjacent to Abingdon Road. As the site has been disused for many years, it might support protected species or Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. So development proposals for this site must be accompanied by an independent assessment in accordance with Policy NE.22 and details of any mitigation proposed.

#### **POLICY SR.4 - DISUSED ALLOTMENTS, ABINGDON ROAD**

Planning permission will be granted for the development of outdoor sports facilities on the disused allotments, Abingdon Road as indicated on the Proposals Map.

### **11.3 Public Open Space**

11.3.1 The most popular areas for informal recreation are Oxford's parks, nature parks, historic cemeteries and common land. Each one has a unique character and offers a particular experience that cannot be enjoyed anywhere else. The City Council will protect areas that are used for such purposes.

#### **POLICY SR.5 - PROTECTION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would result in the loss of public open space including parks, common land, nature parks and historic cemeteries.

Areas of Public Open Space are defined on the Proposals Map.

11.3.2 The City Council will seek to ensure that all residents have access to informal public open space near to their homes. Some areas of Oxford are better served than others. The City Council will seek to create new areas of public open space in order to ensure that there is adequate provision in all areas.

11.3.3 To the south-east of Cutteslowe Park there is an area of disused allotments and a low lying agricultural field fronting the River Cherwell. The City Council considers that this area could be used to advantage as an extension to the park. As much of this land is susceptible to flooding, it is considered that the most suitable use would be to create new wildlife habitats while providing public access. The disused allotments are already important for breeding birds and there is the opportunity to create a wetland area close to the River Cherwell.

#### **POLICY SR.6 - CUTTESLOWE PARK**

Planning permission will be granted for the extension of Cutteslowe Park to create an area of informal public open space as indicated on the Proposals Map.

#### **Provision of Public Open Space as part of new Business, Commercial and Institutional Developments**

11.3.4 The City Council considers that it is important that public open space is provided as part of large-scale business, commercial and institutional developments, such as hospitals. Landscaped seating areas can, for example, be suitable places for employees and hospital patients and visitors to relax.

11.3.5 Public squares perform a similar role in shopping areas by providing places for people to congregate or rest. Currently there are few such areas in Oxford. The City Council wishes to see the provision of squares as part of the Oxpens redevelopment and in Broad Street. Opportunities will be taken to create further squares as part of major new commercial developments.

11.3.6 The provision of new areas of public open space, including children's play space and improvements to sporting facilities, as part of new residential developments are covered in Section 7.0 relating to Housing.

#### **POLICY SR.7 - PROVISION OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AS PART OF NEW BUSINESS, COMMERCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

On large-scale business, commercial and institutional developments the City Council will seek the provision of suitable public open space to serve the recreational needs of employees, customers and hospital patients/visitors where:

- a. there is a shortage of public open space in the vicinity; or
- b. the development would create a significant additional need for public open space.

Where appropriate, as part of major new commercial developments, the City Council will seek contributions for the provision, or enhancement, of public squares which will be secured by planning obligations. Developers will be asked to secure adequate maintenance of new areas of public open space where appropriate.

## 11.4 Allotments

11.4.1 Allotments are defined as greenfield land (previously undeveloped), so Core Policy CP.4 applies. The City Council will protect allotments in active cultivation unless, exceptionally, the proposed development would serve an important wider community interest for which there is no alternative site and replacement land of equal community benefit will be provided.

11.4.2 Where allotments are no longer in active cultivation, the City Council considers that their development should only be permitted where:

- most or all of the allotments have fallen into disuse;
- there is evidence that, despite appropriate efforts to bring them into use, there is no demand for the allotments; and
- there is not a need for the allotments to be used to provide another outdoor recreational facility.

11.4.3 The presence of disused allotments does not necessarily indicate an absence of need, as other factors such as lack of facilities, security and location can also influence the level of use. When the need arising from a proposed development justifies it the City Council will seek a contribution towards improving facilities at other allotment sites nearby where this would encourage people to make greater use of these allotments. Contributions from new residential developments towards the improvement of local allotment facilities will also be sought where the development is likely to lead to increased use being made of the allotments and where the existing facilities are inadequate.

11.4.4 On large new residential developments, the provision of new allotments can, where appropriate, form part of the open space provision required under policy HS.22 in Section 7.0.

#### **POLICY SR.8 - PROTECTION OF ALLOTMENTS**

Planning permission will not be granted for the development of allotment land in active cultivation unless:

- a. there is a need for the allotments to be developed for a use which would serve an important wider community interest and for which there is no alternative site; and
- b. replacement land will be provided which is as good in quality and as accessible to its users as that which it replaces.

Where allotments are no longer in active cultivation, development will only be permitted where:

- c. most or all of the allotments have fallen into disuse;
- d. there is no evidence of demand for use of the allotments after appropriate efforts have been made to bring them into use; and
- e. there is no need for the allotments to be used for other outdoor recreational purposes.

When the need arising from a proposed development justifies it, the City Council will seek a contribution towards the provision of improved facilities on other allotment sites nearby, where appropriate, and this will be secured by a planning obligation.

The City Council will support the creation of additional allotments where justified by demand. A site is identified at Spindleberry Park, Blackbird Leys to meet the potential need arising from residential development.

Existing allotments are identified on the Proposals Map.

## **11.5 Footpaths and Bridleways**

11.5.1 Oxford possesses a well-used network of footpaths, bridleways and towpaths. They provide valuable public access to Oxford's green spaces. Some sections of the canal towpath and the Thames Path National Trail are in a poor condition; they particularly need further improvements to access points and surfacing along the route. Where a site is to be developed close to a proposed new footpath or an existing footpath that new residents (or employees) are likely to use, the City Council will seek a contribution towards appropriate improvements to the local footpath network.

#### **POLICY SR.9 - FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS**

Planning permission will only be granted for developments that affect, or are likely to increase the use of Public Rights of Way if, by planning condition or planning obligation, they safeguard, improve or add to the Public Rights of Way network.

The City Council will seek improvements to enable people with disabilities to use Rights of Way, particularly along the Oxford Canal and the Thames Path National Trail. Contributions for the improvements will be secured through a planning obligation.

11.5.2 The City Council wishes to develop a 'green network' giving access to and across the different areas of open space in Oxford, with links to local shops, community facilities and schools. Existing rights of way already provide a significant number of links but there are gaps in the network.

11.5.3 The policy below lists the major proposals for new footpaths which the City Council intends to pursue. It is not comprehensive, but includes routes particularly significant for recreation, especially those which it wishes to secure as part of any planning proposals. Some of these routes could involve considerable expenditure, for example building footbridges over the River Cherwell. In some cases the precise routes have yet to be finalised, in particular when they cross development sites where the detailed layout has still to be determined. These routes should therefore be taken as indicative.

#### **POLICY SR.10 - CREATION OF FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS**

The Proposals Map indicates new footpath links that the City Council will seek to create. These are:

- a. a footpath network in the Cherwell Valley;
- b. a circular footpath in Iffley Fields, from Meadow Lane along the riverside;
- c. a link between Cheney Lane, Headington Road and Headley Way/Hadow Road (precise route to be determined);
- d. links along the northern bank of the River Isis, including a footpath link between Astons Eyot and Christ Church Meadow;
- e. across Osney Lock;
- f. a bridge over the River Isis on land south of Oxpens Road, with links to Paradise Street and St. Thomas Street;
- g. from Botley Road to Binsey Village and from Binsey Church to Godstow Lock and towards Wytham (precise route to be determined);
- h. from Wood Farm to Shotover via a new footbridge over the Eastern Bypass;
- i. from Godstow Road to Pixey Mead, through the site of the former Wolvercote Paper Mill;
- j. from the Devil's Backbone to Ferry Hinksey Road (part of which might be located in the Vale of White Horse);
- k. a bridge over the railway line to provide a link between Grandpont Park and Hinksey Stream.

Where appropriate, contributions towards the creation of these routes will be secured through a planning obligation.

### **Recreational Cycling**

11.5.4 Proposals for cycle routes are contained in Section 3.0, Transport. Cycling is also an important recreational activity. Routes that give safe access to the surrounding countryside are particularly important. The Sustrans National Cycle Network travels through Oxford running along the Thames towpath and then along the North Oxford cycle route.

#### **POLICY SR.11 - RECREATIONAL CYCLING**

Planning permission will only be granted for developments that affect, or are likely to increase the use of cycle routes if, by condition or obligation, they safeguard, improve

or add to the cycle route network. The design of any improvements must balance the needs of cyclists with the needs of pedestrians and other users, and their enjoyment of the route, without loss of amenity value.

## 11.6 Waterways

11.6.1 The key waterways are the River Isis, River Cherwell and the Oxford Canal. Recreational benefits to both local residents and visitors to Oxford include water sports (particularly rowing, both by the University Colleges and various clubs that operate in Oxford), cruising, angling, cycling and walking. The Isis is a large river and is able to accommodate all of these uses and retain its high environmental quality.

11.6.2 The River Cherwell has a tranquil environment that could be harmed by inappropriate development. The Oxford Canal serves not only the recreational needs of Oxford's residents but also those who use the canal for narrow boat holidays.

11.6.3 There is potential to develop the recreational uses of each of the watercourses provided this is done without a detrimental impact on the waterside environment. On the Isis there is the potential to develop modern river sport facilities on land adjoining Donnington Bridge Road, catering for sports such as rowing, canoeing and sub-aqua. Details of this proposal are given in Section 14.0 Development Sites, Policy DS.25.

11.6.4 The Cherwell will continue to be used for informal recreation such as punting. The City Council will seek to establish new sections of footpath to create a continuous route from St. Clements to the Northern Bypass, especially by providing access from Magdalen Bridge and north of Marston Ferry Road (see Policy SR.10).

11.6.5 A canal basin at Worcester Street car park would provide a major opportunity to expand the use of the canal as a recreational resource. Details of the proposals for this site are dealt with in Section 14.0, Development Sites, Policy DS.91.

11.6.6 More small sewage and refuse disposal points are needed, both to serve the needs of waterway users and prevent pollution of the water environment. They should be designed so that they will not have an adverse impact on the environmental quality of the waterways and their surroundings.

11.6.7 To maintain the existing recreational resource it is also important to prevent the loss of existing water-based recreational facilities in Oxford, including centres for non-commercial boating activities such as college boathouses, boat hire bases, boat passenger services and businesses providing support services for boat users. The City Council will protect such facilities.

### **POLICY SR.12 - PROTECTION OF WATER-BASED RECREATION FACILITIES**

The City Council will protect existing water-based recreation facilities and support services for boat users, unless the facility is to be replaced in another equally accessible and suitable location.

### **POLICY SR.13 - NEW WATER-BASED RECREATION FACILITIES**

Planning permission will be granted for new water-based recreation facilities or extensions to existing facilities except where they would create nuisance, or have a significant adverse effect on the environmental quality of Oxford's waterways and their surroundings.

11.6.8 Visitor moorings in Oxford are comparatively few and often have inadequate facilities. The City Council will therefore encourage the creation of more visitor moorings, particularly as part of new developments such as the Oxpens site (Policy DS.62) and Worcester Street car park (Policy DS.91).

11.6.9 Residential moorings are dealt with in Policy HS.17 of Section 7.0, Housing Policies.

### **POLICY SR.14 - NEW VISITOR MOORINGS**

Planning permission will be granted for additional visitor moorings provided they:

- a. do not cause environmental damage or nuisance;
- b. do not interfere with navigation; and
- c. make adequate provision for refuse and sewage disposal facilities.

The City Council will support the establishment of refuse and sewage disposal points for river and canal users provided they are sited so as not to detract from the canal or river scene.

## **11.7 Community Facilities**

11.7.1 Community facilities such as community centres, halls and places of worship are important in meeting the social and religious needs of the community. Groups with different ethnic, cultural or social backgrounds may wish to have their own particular community facilities. The City Council will protect current facilities and secure suitable sites for additional facilities as the need arises, provided that they do not cause unacceptable nuisance in the local area, for instance, in terms of noise or traffic congestion.

11.7.2 Community centres provide a vital resource for social interaction in the community. Often they are the only available venue for many types of activity. While many community centres are provided by the City Council, there are also others which are provided by religious and other bodies which will also be protected.

11.7.3 Where residential developments are proposed in areas deficient in community facilities or where the facilities are currently substandard, and the proposed development will increase the need for their provision, the City Council will seek a contribution towards either the provision of additional facilities or improving existing facilities. The provision of community centres at local schools can also serve the local community to their mutual benefit.

### **POLICY SR.15 - COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

Planning permission will not be granted for development that would result in the loss of community facilities where there is a need for the facility to be retained in its current location.

Planning permission will only be granted for the loss of community facilities where:

- a. it can be demonstrated that there is no longer a need for the facility and the

- needs of the community can be equally well met at other facilities elsewhere;  
or
- b. an equivalent replacement facility is to be provided at an equally accessible location.

Planning permission will be granted for new community facilities subject to the site being:

- c. readily accessible to the relevant community by walking, cycling and public transport; and
- d. in a location where significant problems of noise and disturbance to local residents can be prevented.

The City Council will attach appropriate planning conditions about hours of use, and will require noise insulation where necessary.

The City Council will seek contributions towards the provision of community facilities where the need arising from the proposed development justifies it, and this will be secured by a planning obligation.

11.7.4 There is a shortage of community facilities in some parts of Oxford and the following sites have been allocated for new facilities in these areas. All of these sites are covered in Section 14.0, Development Sites, except SR.16 b, g, and j. The Proposals Map contains a symbol that shows the indicative location of the proposed community facilities.

#### **POLICY SR.16 - PROPOSED NEW COMMUNITY FACILITIES**

Planning permission will be granted for new community facilities at:

- a. Canalside Land, Jericho;
- b. Catacombs, Littlegate Street;
- c. Cowley Marsh Depot Site, Marsh Road;
- d. Diamond Place, Ferry Pool Car Park;
- e. Donnington School Site, Cornwallis Road;
- f. Dunnock Way Site, Blackbird Leys;
- g. Land at Titup Hall Drive, Wood Farm;
- h. Leiden Road, Wood Farm;
- i. OAC Factory Site, Woodstock Road; and
- j. Scout Hut, Marston Road, and/or another site in New Marston.

Proposed new community facilities listed above are shown on the Proposals Map.

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