

Background Paper D(iii): Green Spaces, Sports and Leisure

1 Introduction

1.1 The intention of Policy CS23 of the Core Strategy is to ensure that a balance of publicly accessible green space and leisure and sports facilities is maintained. It is particularly important that as new development occurs in Oxford and the population grows, enough infrastructure is in place to offer a good quality of life, and this certainly includes green spaces. Green infrastructure may include spaces such as parks, allotments, playgrounds, sports pitches and nature conservation areas. All of these have an important contribution in making Oxford sustainable and can contribute to healthier communities.

2 Government policy

2.1 PPG17: Planning for Green Space, Sport and Recreation says that: 'Local Authorities should undertake audits of existing green space, sports and recreational facilities...' (paragraph 3). These should audit quality and quantity and investigate opportunities for new green space and facilities. Deficits or surpluses of green space form the starting point for establishing an effective strategy for green space.

2.2 Strategic Leisure Limited completed three strategies in January 2006: the Indoor Facilities Strategy, the Outdoor Recreation Strategy and the Community Centres Strategy. At the same time, Scott Wilson undertook a Green Space Study for the City Council, which was intended to give a detailed analysis of this topic. These studies were prepared in accordance with PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, and its Companion Guide.

2.3 PPG17 says that Local Authorities should use information gathered in these audits of green space to set local standards in their development plans. It is also suggested that green spaces that are of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities. This may include spaces that offer important local amenity and recreational and play opportunities, or that benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

3 Findings of the Green Space Study

3.1 The Green Space Study analysed the database of green space provision at the City level and it also broke the information down into Urban Villages. Urban Villages were defined by the study to reflect more closely how communities use green space than political boundaries such as wards. 16 Urban Villages were identified.

3.2 The Study found that there is an average of 5.75ha of unrestricted access green space per 1000 population across Oxford. However, there is a wide variation across the City.

3.3 **Table 1** below shows the variation that exists between available green space in different urban villages. Barton and Sandhills, Summertown and Littlemore have the lowest hectares of unrestricted green space per 1000 population. However, these areas all have many areas of green space that are either limited or restricted.

Table 1: Level of green space provision in Urban Villages

Urban village	Population	All Green Space (ha)	Unrestricted Green Space (ha)	Ha Unrestricted /1000 population
Abingdon Road	4958	57.74	31.70	6.39
Barton and Sandhills	4659	15.87	9.16	1.97
Blackbird Leys	12192	38.15	27.41	2.25
Botley Road and Binsey	3154	61.73	21.56	6.83
City Centre	12747	47.06	40.30	3.16
Cuttleslowe	2641	47.10	44.66	16.91
East Oxford	20924	152.35	61.66	2.95
Headington	19056	90.10	58.11	3.05
Littlemore	3197	33.47	3.19	1.00
Marston	6050	37.77	28.61	4.73
Risinghurst	2276	11.10	9.43	4.14
Rose Hill/ Temple Cowley	14064	73.23	58.38	4.15
St Margaret's	9576	79.79	64.77	6.76
Summertown	7716	12.43	8.99	1.16
Wolvercote	1942	165.78	147.30	75.85
Wood Farm	8853	154.88	140.60	15.88
Not in urban village	-	29.90	14.91	
<i>CITY TOTAL</i>	<i>134005</i>	<i>1108.46</i>	<i>770.76</i>	
<i>CITY AVERAGE</i>				<i>5.75</i>

3.4 Recommendations for each Urban Village are contained in the Study. The recommendations are based on assessments of the quality and type of green space in each Urban Village, and whether there is a surplus or deficit of unrestricted green space in that Urban Village (as compared to the city standard).

3.5 The Study sets out a vision for green space in Oxford: 'The green space of Oxford makes an important contribution to its unique character and quality. The vision is to rationalise its extent to meet more closely the needs of local communities, and improve its quality through enhancing its appearance and ecological value and providing a full range of

recreational opportunities. Its use by all sections of the community should also be encouraged so as to promote social inclusion, improve health and enhance the quality of life.'

- 3.6 The study formulated some objectives to help achieve this vision. It was seen as important that a City standard of 5.75ha per 1000 population of green space be maintained. This objective was supported by the consultation that was carried out as part of the study, which indicated that 80% of respondents felt that the amount of green space in Oxford was about right.

4 Core Strategy Approach

- 4.1 Based on the recommendation of the Green Space Study, and the consultation at the Preferred Options stage, Policy CS23 states that a standard of 5.75 ha of green space per 1000 population should be maintained. The standard is intended to ensure protection of existing green space, and that future developments provide appropriate additional green space. To meet this objective it was recommended in the Green Space Study that high value, high quality sites are protected, as well as City and Neighbourhood sites, and that requirements for developments to contribute towards improving quantity, quality of green spaces. Developers will also be encouraged to open up new access to green spaces where previously there was no public access.
- 4.2 The Local Plan allocates and protects areas of green space. This will be reviewed in the proposed Site Allocations DPD, as will areas designated in the Local Plan for their Nature Conservation interest. Local Plan policies, or their replacements, will be used in conjunction with the new Core Strategy policy.
- 4.3 Core Strategy Policy CS23 states that: 'improvements to, or the provision of, public open space, will be sought in accordance with Policy CS19.' More details can be found in the Planning Obligations SPD, which sets out the standard for requiring contributions to green space where they are more appropriate than on-site provision.
- 4.4 In areas with a low quantity of provision it may be appropriate to require on site provision or to use developer contributions for green space creation. Change of access arrangements to restricted access sites should be considered. However, an assessment should also be made as to whether improvements to accessibility or quality could compensate for a lower quantity of available green space. Policy CS23 also states that: 'opportunities will be sought for opening up access to new public spaces, for providing suitable new open spaces on or near to development sites, and for providing public access to private facilities.'
- 4.5 It is important that the Core Strategy is flexible. The type of green space that will be appropriate for different types of development and in different parts of the city will vary. The Core Strategy is not the place to provide more detailed guidance on this. It will need to be assessed on a case by case basis, using the analysis and recommendations of the

Green Space study as a guideline. Planning Officers will also liaise with leisure and parks officers where necessary to help identify the types of new facility that are most suitable.

5 How will the 5.75 citywide standard be maintained?

- 5.1 The Study identified that 5.75 hectares of green space per 1000 population is an appropriate citywide target, and this is carried forward into policy CS23, with further requirements in the Policy intended to ensure provision of open space of sufficient quality and quantity.
- 5.2 The citywide target cannot be achieved simply by providing 5.75 ha of green space per 1000 population on each new housing development site. It is not practical to apply this target to all new developments. In some cases it is undesirable to create new green space, as the space created would be too small to be useable. Even for larger new developments the standard cannot be applied as a requirement for new green space, as a very large proportion of any site would be needed for the green space. On a 1 hectare site, for example, at the indicative density used for calculations in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) there are likely to be about 55 dwellings. According to the Balance of Dwellings Supplementary Planning Document, using the middle of the range that applies to strategic sites, 7 of these should be 1-bed, 14 should be 2-bed, 26 should be 3 bed and 8 4-bed. At average occupancy rates (shown in the Planning Obligations SPD), that will lead to 141 people living on the development. That means 0.81 hectares of green space would be required on site. That is 80% of the site, and clearly not feasible.
- 5.3 Average densities very much lower than 55 dwellings per hectare would not be suitable in Oxford, and would jeopardise many other aims. The application of a standard of 5.75ha of green space per 1000 population as an on site requirement for new developments would not help to build strong communities or enable the types of densities required to support local services or public transport. Also, small new developments would not be able to provide usable public green space on site.
- 5.4 Whilst the standard cannot be applied directly to all new developments, it is important that new development across Oxford does not make the balance worse. It is still important that the need generated for green space is considered by new developments. There are many ways that new developments can contribute to green space provision to meet this need. The citywide target is considered achievable
- 5.5 Green space contributions and in some cases on site public green space are required from some non-residential developments, as well as residential developments. There are also likely to be many opportunities across the City for access to be opened up to facilities that are private currently. New private facilities will also be required to provide public access. As well as this, larger areas of new development are likely to provide opportunities to green up access to off-site areas of green space. For example, a potential strategic development site has been identified at Barton, and land at

Summertown has been identified as having potential to meet longer-term development needs. The Summertown site includes few areas of accessible green space. If the site were developed in the future, fields may be moved to the edges of the site, and it would be ensured that these would have some degree of public access. There is also the opportunity to provide much greater access to green space along the Cherwell, perhaps even with a new bridge to the meadows on the eastern side of the river. Similar opportunities exist at the strategic site at Barton.

- 5.6 It is notable that Barton and Summertown have the second and third lowest amounts of public open space in the City per 1000 population (see **Table 1** above). Whilst neither of these areas have very large amounts of green space overall, the existence of currently inaccessible green space does provide opportunities, as does the existence of large amount of open space on the edges of the areas. Opportunities will be sought and will be important in trying to maintain the overall balance of green spaces in the City.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Core Strategy is worded to ensure that larger developments provide on-site green space where this will make a positive contribution to the range of green space already available in the area. Contributions will continue to be taken to improve the quality of existing green space. Opportunities will be sought to open up new areas of green space to the general public, especially where large new sites are developed such as at Summertown, and new developments may be expected to provide this access. The Core Strategy will therefore ensure that new green spaces are provided and existing ones improved.