

Title: Leisure and Recreation Development Plan Document

**Portfolio Holders: Cllr Phillips – Planning
Cllr Wiltshire - Leisure**

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Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek the approval of Council for a draft new development plan document (DPD) for leisure and recreation. The draft DPD is enclosed separately. Copies of the consultation reports and sustainability appraisal are available to view in the Members' room and on request.

Background

This Council is producing a Leisure and Recreation DPD which will replace the planning policies in the current development plan relating to recreation and will provide a policy framework for the Council's ongoing review of its leisure and recreation facilities.

A preferred options paper was subject to formal public consultation during summer 2006. Following consideration of the consultation responses and the views of the Government Office for the South West, these preferred options were drafted into policies and this preferred options (2) paper was subject to a further period of public consultation between March and May 2007.

Preferred Options

The main preferred options were:

- Protect high value and high quality open space and sport and recreation provision from development for other land uses. Wherever possible, these facilities should be enhanced to meet local needs;
- Require developers to provide or contribute to new open space and leisure facilities in accordance with quantity and accessibility standards;
- Maximise the use of developer contributions to enhance existing provision across the district wherever possible;
- Review low value spaces considering the following order of priority:
 - (i) retain the site and enhance it when resources allow;
 - (ii) retain the site and convert it to the most appropriate alternative form of greenspace use when resources allow;

- (iii) consider disposal for other uses and use the money in the immediate vicinity of the land sold to enhance existing spaces or facilities of more value to the local community;
- Identify and develop a small number of multi-pitch grass sites to serve Melksham, Trowbridge and Westbury;
- Develop a refurbishment and/or replacement programme for the 8 Council owned leisure centres;
- Develop third generation artificial turf pitches, designed to support multi-team and multi-age community clubs, on secondary school sites;
- Develop a Play Strategy to identify needs / opportunities and a suitable hierarchy of provision;
- Consult with teenagers to provide a network of facilities that comply with the standards set out in the needs assessment;
- Move to a flexible and varied maintenance regime that recognises the different roles and functions of local spaces;
- Maintain the current uses on Southwick Country Park with some minor improvements to signage and maintenance regimes.

Key Issues

Consultation

Consultation responses were received from 248 organisations and individuals at the preferred options stage and a further 19 organisations and individuals responded to the preferred options (2) consultation ending May 2007.

The major issues raised included:

- Support for the vision but need for detailed proposals and resources to achieve it;
- Make clearer the links between health and deprivation issues and greenspace;
- The plan should support better accessibility to facilities for pedestrians, cyclists, those with disabilities and low income families;
- Local standards should reflect more accurately the views of local councils;
- Landowners/developers should have more flexibility to dispose of open space;
- When reviewing open spaces the local community should be consulted;
- Open space should be registered as town or village greens;
- There is potential for enhancing wildlife habitats on low value sites;
- Access to the countryside should respect local character;
- The plan should include policies/references to leisure cycle routes / equestrian based leisure activity / motor sports in the countryside, etc.
- Developers should not just provide open spaces but subsequently must maintain them;
- The Council should take advantage of development funded leisure opportunities;
- Friends groups and town and parish councils should be given the opportunity to manage and maintain open spaces;
- Support for refurbishing or replacing indoor sports halls but opposition to replacing Christie Miller, Westbury pool;
- Support for better and more stimulating play facilities;

- Support for further grass and artificial pitches at the towns but opposition to some specific proposals (e.g. Woolmore Farm, Bowerhill);
- Developer support for Leigh Park scheme rather than Lafarge, Westbury;
- Concerns from clubs about pitch availability and costs of pitch hire;
- Support for further teenage facilities in consultation with young people;
- Support for further water based activities including finding a route for the Wilts and Berks canal through Melksham;
- Support for more imaginative uses at Southwick Country Park;
- Some opposition to a prescriptive approach to tree planting in new development;
- Suggestions for ways of opening up schools for more community use;
- Suggestions for funding include requiring local parishes to take on more responsibility, commercial sponsorship, encouraging self-sustaining private ventures and efficiency savings ring fenced for local enhancement.
- The plan should refer to the range of other policies and plans in existence and should clearly set out its status.

Sustainability Appraisal

A Sustainability Appraisal Report (SA Report) was issued with the preferred options paper for consultation and an amended report was subsequently issued with preferred options (2) paper. The SA Report made a number of suggested amendments to options and possible mitigation measures to improve the environmental impact of policies and proposals. A number of stakeholders made suggestions for amendments to the format and content of the SA report itself.

Submission Development Plan Document

Taking account of the consultation responses received and the recommendations arising from the SA report, officers have prepared a draft DPD for submission to the Secretary of State.

The following changes to the preferred options papers have been incorporated into the submission DPD:

- Spatial portrait of the District and policy context added;
- Central sustainable development objective identified;
- Focus on key spatial policies and outcomes arising from this DPD;
- Policies made more place specific;
- Specific proposals for future pitch provision focused on deliverable sites only - Woolmore Farm, Melksham; Woodmarsh, North Bradley; Lafarge sports ground, Westbury; Vivash park, Westbury
- Clearer links with community strategies / area plans identified;
- Clear delivery mechanisms identified, including integrating the corporate leisure action plan into the document and including a commitment to producing a supplementary planning document;
- Greater emphasis on meeting the access needs of local people;
- Greater emphasis on enhancing biodiversity and respecting landscape character;
- Referring specifically to consulting with the local community on reviews of spaces;

- Supporting partnership working with friends groups and local parish councils in the management and maintenance of open spaces, where appropriate;
- Setting out the need for more challenging play equipment;
- Recognising problems with sports clubs' access to public facilities;
- Reflecting SA recommended mitigation measures in the site specific policies;
- Identifying a suitable monitoring framework, including targets and indicators.

The proposed submission DPD has been subject to further sustainability appraisal work and an updated SA report has been produced.

A consultation statement setting out how the Council has engaged with the community during the preparation of this DPD will be prepared for submission.

The Next Steps

Cabinet considered the draft submission DPD at its meeting on 5 September 2007. Cabinet recommendations will be reported to this meeting of Council. Should Council approve this draft DPD, it will be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

There will be a final formal six week period of public consultation on this document immediately following submission of the document to Government.

The independent examination is currently scheduled to begin in May 2008. An inspector appointed by the Secretary of State will consider if the DPD is sound and will publish recommendations which will be binding upon the Council.

The Leisure & Recreation DPD is due to be adopted by December 2008. At that time its contents will replace the recreation policies contained within the current development plan (Structure and District Plans).

Effect on Strategies and Codes

Encouraging the use of parks and open spaces and ensuring access for all are key priorities contained within the West Wiltshire Community Strategy. The Strategy states that the Council will develop policies and initiatives to implement the results of the leisure and recreation needs assessment.

The review of leisure and recreation policies is a key performance task contained within the spotlight area "Better access to recreation" of the Council's corporate plan 2006-2010.

Risk Management Implications

There is a risk that some of the planning policies and proposals will not survive the development plan planning process, for example, an Inspector at a future public examination may reject an option and propose instead an option put forward by a third party. This can be minimised by ensuring that the draft plan is "sound". This depends, partly, upon ensuring that the process for preparing the DPD has been robust, and officers

are seeking to ensure that the process complies with planning regulations, guidance and best practice.

Financial Implications

The preparation of this DPD has been planned for through the service planning process and a budget for an independent examination have been secured. The proposals contained within this DPD are part of the leisure facilities review process and are being planned for through the Council's service planning process.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

The production of a DPD is part of the statutory local development framework process which will involve a further period of public consultation and an independent examination process before the final document can be adopted.

Conclusions

A Leisure and Recreation DPD has been prepared for submission to the Government. The document has been prepared taking account of the results of public consultation and sustainability appraisal.

Recommendations

Council is recommended to:

- Approve the preferred options consultation reports;
- Approve the draft Leisure and Recreation Development Plan Document for submission to the Secretary of State for public examination;
- Approve the draft Leisure and Recreation Development Plan Document as a material consideration for development control purposes.

Background Papers

File Ref: Leisure and Recreation Development Plan Document

File Location: Leisure Services / Planning Policy and Conservation Services

Plain English