

Introduction and background

Introduction and scope

- 1.1 In December 2004, Harborough District Council (the Council) appointed PMP to undertake an audit of **open space, sport and recreation provision and assessment of local needs** across the whole of the Harborough district area (the district).
- 1.2 This study aims to provide a clear picture of existing and future needs for open space and sport and recreation in Harborough and the current ability to meet those needs in terms of quality, quantity and accessibility. The study is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the latest Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space Sport and Recreation, July 2002) and its Companion Guide (September 2002).
- 1.3 PPG17 states that *“the government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and sports and recreational facilities”*.
- 1.4 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 and community cohesion
 - health and well being
 - promoting more sustainable development.
- 1.5 The major change in the policy guidance is the requirement for local authority decisions regarding open space to be informed by local needs assessments and an audit of existing provision. Such audits should incorporate qualitative, quantitative and accessibility considerations as well as the overall non-monetary value of the land including the level of use. National standards are no longer considered to meet local needs, although they may be used as benchmarks.
- 1.6 Other subsequent changes in this planning policy document are :
 - the definition of open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals and lakes which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation
 - a greater emphasis is placed on qualitative considerations – this is particularly important as it will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and/or maintenance of open space
 - it advocates the setting of local standards appropriate to the local area rather than assessment by national standards although these can be used as benchmarks – the Government believes that national standards are inappropriate, as they do not take into account the demographics of an area, the specific needs of residents and the extent of built development

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- it provides further guidance on the constituent elements of open space typologies
 - it clearly acknowledges the multiple functions that open spaces can perform.
- 1.7 The policy guidance sets out priorities for local authorities in terms of:
- assessing needs and opportunities – undertaking audits of open space, sport and recreational facilities
 - setting local standards
 - maintaining an adequate supply of open space
 - planning for new open space.
- 1.8 The companion guide sets out the process for undertaking local assessments of needs and audits of provision. It also:
- indicates how councils can establish the needs of local communities and apply provision standards
 - promotes a consistent approach across varying types of open space.
- 1.9 PMP has followed the recommendations of PPG17 throughout the study. Following this methodology maximises the potential the resulting strategy has to make a real difference to the quality, accessibility and quantity of open spaces in Harborough.
- 1.10 The open space audit and analysis has been undertaken incorporating quantitative and qualitative information, using various typologies of open spaces in driving policies and actions forward whilst recognising the wider benefits of open spaces.
- 1.11 The study considers all nine typologies of open space identified by PPG17 and also analyses indoor sport and recreation facilities. It takes into account open spaces provided and managed by other organisations including Parish Councils providing a more accurate picture of current provision within the District. The recent Audit Commission inspection on Health and Quality of life – Leisure provision commended the quality of the majority of amenity provision within Harborough.
- 1.12 This study will provide an overall framework that will guide the Council's Planning and Leisure Divisions over the next 5-10 years in the future management and designation of open spaces and the production of an open space and recreation strategy. It will inform the local plan which is to be produced next year.
- 1.13 The study and resulting strategy and supplementary planning policy will enable Harborough DC to ensure the most effective and efficient use of open spaces and indoor sport and recreation facilities within the district and plan and respond appropriately to any pressures of immediate and future developments.

Background

- 1.14 The District of Harborough has a population of around 76,500, and is the largest district in terms of area within Leicestershire. It is a largely rural district, which borders Warwickshire in the west and Rutland in the east. To the north the district borders Leicester, whilst in the south, the Rivers Avon and Welland form its southern boundary with Northamptonshire.

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.15 The population is estimated to have grown by just over 12.7% since 1991 – this population growth is significantly higher than both the national average of 2.5% and the county average of 5.7%. 45% of the population of the district is located within one of the three largest settlements – Market Harborough, Lutterworth and Broughton Astley. Other larger settlements within the district include Fleckney, Thurnby, Great Glen and Kibworth Beauchamp.
- 1.16 Harborough DC is ranked at 338 out of 354 (where 1 is the most deprived) according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). None of the wards within the district are ranked within the top 40% of most deprived wards in the Country. Using the overall index of multiple deprivation indicator the most deprived is Langton, which is in the top 45%. Despite this relative affluence, there are five wards in the most deprived 10% when taking into account the access to services. This suggests that the accessibility of open spaces may emerge to be an important issue for the Council.

Why public open space?

- 1.17 Open space and recreation provision has an important role to play within the district and there are a number of specific important issues to understand:

i) Function of open space

Open spaces can provide a number of functions within the urban fabric of cities, towns and villages. For example, the provision for play and informal recreation, a landscaping buffer within and between the built environment and/or a habitat for the promotion of biodiversity. Each type of open space has many various benefits, which depend on the type of open space, for example allotments for the growing of own produce, play areas for children's play and playing pitches for formal sports events.

ii) Balance of provision

There is a required need to provide a balance between different types of open space in order to meet local needs. For example, not all open space should be in the form of playing pitches or allotments. Some local needs will demand 'green corridor' sites such as nature walks or bridleways and other will require small informal recreation areas such as 'amenity greenspace'.

In accordance with PPG17, this balance of provision should be based on local needs and the requirements of ensuring the provision of an attractive environment for people to live, work and play.

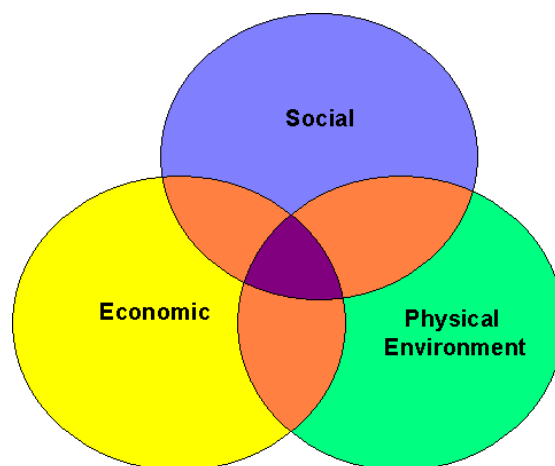
- 1.18 Changing social and economic circumstances have placed new demands on open spaces. They have to serve more diverse communities and face competition from various developers including sport and leisure. There are however new opportunities to develop the role of open spaces.
- 1.19 They can promote community cohesion, encourage community development and stimulate partnerships between the public and private sector.
- 1.20 Public open space cuts across many people's lives and is a source of local concern for a variety of reasons:
- issues like anti-social behaviour, litter and dog fouling, graffiti and conditions of parks and play areas impacts greatly on the quality of people's daily lives

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- the design, management and maintenance of open spaces directly influences perceptions of safety and actual public usage
- local publicly accessible open space is often of worse quality for people already suffering from other forms of deprivation
- the involvement of local people and partnership working is crucial in reaching the right solutions.

1.21 The theme of public open space fits shared priorities of national and local government – crime, health and social inclusion. It impacts on the social environment, physical environment and economic environment as shown in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1



- 1.22 The Government recognises through its publication of 'Our Towns and Cities': The Future Delivering an Urban Renaissance' (November 2002) that there is overwhelming need to develop a vision for the future of parks and open spaces and that there is a need to improve information on quality and quantity of parks and open spaces and the way they are used and maintained.
- 1.23 This study considers open space sites and how they can meet the needs of the resident population both now and in the future.

Benefits of open space

- 1.24 Open spaces including parks, playgrounds, amenity greenspace, nature reserves and the countryside are diverse locations that provide opportunities for a range of formal and informal leisure, passive and active sport, recreation and play.
- 1.25 Parks and open spaces are more accessible to a wider range of people than sports and leisure facilities and are better able to realise the aims of social inclusion and equality of opportunity. The provision of open spaces and recreation provision is also key to an ideal community.
- 1.26 It is widely recognised that the provision of high quality 'public realm' facilities such as parks and open spaces can assist in the promotion of an area as an attractive place to live, and can result in a number of benefits. These are highlighted in Table 1.1 overleaf:

Table 1.1 – Benefits of open space

Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing safe outdoor areas that are available to all ages of the local population to mix and socialise • social cohesion - potential to engender a sense of community ownership and pride • providing opportunities for community events, voluntary activities and charitable fund raising • providing opportunities to improve health and take part in a wide range of outdoor sports and activities.
Recreational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing easily accessible recreation areas as an alternative to other more chargeable leisure pursuits • offers wide range of leisure opportunities from informal leisure and play to formal events, activities and games. • open spaces, particularly parks, are the first areas where children come into contact with the natural world • play opportunities are a vital factor in the development of children.
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reducing motor car dependence to access specific facilities • providing habitats for wildlife as an aid to local biodiversity • helping to stabilise urban temperatures and humidity • providing opportunities for the recycling of organic materials • providing opportunities to reduce transport use through the provision of local facilities.
Educational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • valuable educational role in promoting an understanding of nature and the opportunity to learn about the environment • open spaces can be used to demonstrate virtues of sustainable development and health awareness.
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adding value to surrounding property, both commercial and residential, thus increasing local tax revenues • contribution to urban regeneration and renewal projects • contributing to attracting visitors and tourism, including using the parks as venues for major events • encouraging employment and inward investment • complementing new development with a landscape that enhances its value.

Best Value and Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

- 1.27 The Council is required to carry out Best Value Reviews and the Best Value Performance Plan outlines the purpose, aims and values of the Council and sets out what the Council is trying to achieve for the benefit of the whole community.
- 1.28 A recent Best Value inspection for health and community development in August 2003 commented that the Council is delivering many examples of high quality public space initiatives and many sites are highly valued by residents and well used. Other on-going Best Value reviews and planning services provide an opportunity to develop

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

the role of this service in open space planning (Local Plan Review and the evolving planning guidelines) (planning standards and agreements).

- 1.29 CPA is a new assessment mechanism, announced by the Government in 2001, to assess different levels of councils across the country. It is not a service inspection but a corporate assessment of a council to deliver improvement using universal cross-cutting themes including :

- balancing housing markets
- **public space – clean, green and safe**

The Audit Commission on-site appraisal of Harborough District Council was undertaken in May 2004, prior to which a self-assessment entitled “ The Improving Council” was completed in March 2004.

- 1.30 The key assessment indicators of public open space within the CPA are :

- (i) Management of the Physical Environment
 - effectiveness of design and maintenance of open spaces
 - accessibility of open spaces
 - contribution of planning policy to the quality environment
- (ii) Keeping the Locality Clean
 - success of reducing vandalism, litter, dog fouling
 - effective partnership working with local providers
- (iii) Improve Community Safety
 - realistic setting of plans for the future
 - strengthening community cohesion
 - addressing anti-social behaviour
- (iv) Promoting an Active Life
 - effectiveness of partnerships to provide a range of recreational activities for young people
 - meeting needs of different groups in terms of pricing and accessibility
 - supporting activities within the local community
- (v) Assessing Partnerships
 - working with County Council
 - working with voluntary sector and private sector in providing open space and promoting its usage to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle

- 1.31 Using public space (that includes open space as defined within this study) as a key assessment indicator demonstrates the importance of developing this strategy. CPA will assess what the Council has or has not achieved in terms of improvements in the area of public open space specifically against targets set by the Council. The Best Value Performance plan highlights the achievements of the Council during the last year, and sets out how the Council will work towards achieving its' corporate visions.

Need for local assessments

- 1.32 A local assessment of open space and open space needs will enable the Council to:
- plan positively, creatively and effectively in identifying priority areas for improvement and to target appropriate types of open space required
 - ensure an adequate provision of high quality, accessible open space to meet the needs of community
 - ensure any accessible funding is invested in the right places where there is the most need
 - conduct S106 negotiations with developers from a position of knowledge with evidence to support.
- 1.33 Where no assessment exists, developers can undertake their own independent assessment to demonstrate that open space is surplus to requirements. It is therefore desirable for the Council to have robust data to protect open space within the district.

Outcomes of local assessments

- 1.34 A local assessment of open space will enable the Council to plan effectively and achieve some desirable key outcomes required by PPG17. These are :
- provision of networks of accessible, high quality open space for sport and recreation that meet the needs of residents and visitors
 - provision of open spaces that are 'fit for purpose' – the right type in the right place and of the right size
 - provision of open spaces that are economically and environmentally sustainable
 - provision of an appropriate balance between new open space and enhancement of existing provision
 - setting locally derived provision standards
 - provision of clarity and reasonable certainty for developers and land owners.
- 1.35 It will also enable Parish Councils to review similar issues within their own areas.

Summary

- 1.36 This local assessment will provide an analysis of existing provision and appropriate policies and actions for each type of open space and sport and recreation.
- 1.37 This will enable the Council to plan effectively the provision of open space and sport and recreation to meet the current and future needs and enhance existing open spaces where required.