

2. CONTEXT

2.1 There are many other national, regional and local strategies and initiatives that provide a framework that any strategy must work within. The realisation that open space contributes widely to the quality of life, and can have an impact on health, social inclusion and crime, amongst other themes, means that these strategies are far more wide reaching than just leisure and recreation. A selection of the main strategies are detailed below, whilst **Table 2.1** gives the wider perspective.

National Framework

2.2 The following are national documents of relevance, and are explained in turn below.

- Policy Planning Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation. ODPM, 2002.
- Policy Planning Guidance 9 – Nature Conservation. ODPM, 1999.
- Accessible Natural Green Space. English Nature.
- Green Spaces, Better Places. DTLR, 2002.

Policy Planning Guidance 17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation.

2.3 PPG17, updated in 2002, sets out the Government's policy on open space, sport and recreation, the main planning objectives being:

- Supporting an urban renaissance. Local networks of high quality and well managed and maintained open spaces, and sport and recreational facilities, help create urban environments that are attractive, clean and safe. Green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by

acting as 'green lungs' can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality;

- Supporting a rural renewal. The countryside can provide opportunities for recreation and visitors can play an important role in the regeneration of the economies of rural areas. Open spaces within rural settlements and accessibility to local sports and recreational facilities contribute to the quality of life and well being of people who live in rural areas;
- Promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion. Well- planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live. As a focal point for community activities, they can bring together members of deprived communities and provide opportunities for people for social interaction;
- Health and well being. Open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role to play in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others;
- Promoting more sustainable development. By ensuring that open space and sports and recreational facilities are easily accessible by walking and cycling, and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well served by public transport.

2.4 A key change from the previous PPG17 is that of the requirement to undertake a local assessment of existing open space provision and the setting of local provision standards to ensure that adequate supply of high quality open space is provided.

Table 2.1: Relationship to Other Strategies, Policies and Initiatives

Context	Document/Policy/Initiative
National	PPG 17: Sport, Open Spaces and Recreation
	PPG 9: Nature Conservation
	Green Spaces Better Places. DTLR
	Accessible Greenspace. English Nature
	National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949
	Countryside Agency Strategy
	CRoW Act, 2000
	Rural White Paper
	Natura 2000
	Regional
North Wessex Downs AONB	
Cotswold Water Park Strategy	
Cotswold Water Park Biodiversity Plan	
Rebuilding Biodiversity	
North Wiltshire District Council	Local Plan 2011
	Rural Strategy
	Leisure Facilities Strategy 2001-2007
	Leisure Plan
	Playing Pitch Strategy
	Cultural Strategy
	Local Strategic Partnership & developing Community Strategy
	Open space management
Local	Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan
	PRoW Improvement Plan
	Great Western Community Forest Plan
	User 'Panels'

2.5 It is recommended that existing areas of open space that are of high quality or valued by a community should be given protection and any development within them strictly controlled. Areas of particular quality may include:

- Small areas of open space in urban areas that provide an important local amenity and offer recreational and play opportunities;
- Areas of open space that provide a community resource and can be used for informal events;
- Areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

2.6 In terms of provision of new open space it is recommended that local authorities should:

- Promote accessibility by walking, cycling and public transport, and ensure that facilities are accessible for people with disabilities;
- Locate more intensive recreational uses in sites where they can contribute to town centre vitality and viability;
- Avoid any significant loss of amenity to residents, neighbouring uses or biodiversity;
- Improve the quality of the public realm through good design;
- Look to provide areas of open space in commercial and industrial areas;
- Add to and enhance the range and quality of existing facilities;
- Carefully consider security and personal safety, especially of children;
- Meet the regeneration needs of areas, using brownfield sites in preference to greenfield site;

- Consider the scope for using any surplus land for open space, sport or recreational use, weighing this against alternative uses;
- Assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion; and,
- Consider the recreational needs of visitors and tourists.

2.7 Finally, PPG17 states that local authorities will be justified (provided that a local assessment has been undertaken and standards set) in seeking planning obligations where the quality of provision is inadequate, or where new development increases local needs.

Policy Planning Guidance 9: Nature Conservation

2.8 PPG9 outlines the Government's policy on nature conservation and gives the background to the statutory framework designed to protect the natural environment, through acts such as the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Through this framework the Government aims to 'ensure that policies contribute to the conservation of the abundance and diversity of British wildlife and habitats' and that any adverse effects on wildlife are minimised. A key point is that it is not central government's responsibility alone, but a part should be played by others to ensure that effective conservation of wildlife and natural resources is maintained, whilst allowing for development and economic growth – that is, sustainable development.

Most nature conservation designations are made by the agency responsible for nature conservation in England, English Nature. The main mechanisms that can be utilised by local authorities are through the Local Plan procedure, development control, declaration of Local Nature Reserves, supporting projects and working towards Biodiversity Action Plan targets, as signed up to by the Council, that promote biodiversity outside of designated sites, and leading by example.

Accessible Natural Green Space. English Nature

2.9 The Accessible Natural Green Space model from English Nature first met its audience as 'Reconnecting People and Wildlife' in 2002. It is concerned with the connection between people and wildlife and the benefit the latter can have on the former. It aims to put sustainability and wildlife issues closer to the centre of political and social debate. One of the key recommendations is to encourage local authorities to adopt English Nature standards for the minimum provision of accessible natural greenspace. These standards are:

- An accessible natural greenspace less than 300 metres (in a straight line) from home;
- Statutory Local Nature Reserves) LNR's provided at a minimum level of one hectare per thousand population;
- At least one accessible 20 hectare site within 2 kilometres of home; one accessible 100 hectare site within 5 kilometres of home; and one accessible 500 hectare site within 10 kilometres of home.

2.10 These standards are very high and may prove difficult to achieve, however some effort should be put in to working towards them.

Green Spaces, Better Places

2.11 This document is the final report of the Urban Greenspaces Taskforce, which was set up in 2001 to advise the Government on policies and proposals for the future of urban parks, play areas and green spaces. The document is in four parts. Part one sets the scene, detailing the benefits that open spaces bring. Part two outlines current concerns about parks and green spaces and sets out proposals to overcome them. Part three sets out the need for a strategic policy framework within which decision-makers should operate. The final section takes forward the recommendations and shows why they can deliver all the benefits of green space.

2.12 One of the key recommendations arising from the report was the creation of a national body to represent the interest of open space. This has now been achieved with the establishment of 'Greenspace'.

2.13 The other recommendations that are pertinent indicate that local authorities should:

- involve and support communities in green space service planning and delivery;
- promote and support partnership working for improving local green spaces;
- explore the potential for making greater use of local 'open space trusts' as an effective option for delivering improvements to green spaces and their management and maintenance;
- Provide information and advice on available funding streams and opportunities for supporting local partnerships involving local resident, voluntary and business groups;
- Provide effective leadership at the highest level within the council by designating an elected Member to champion and promote parks and green spaces;
- Give greater weight to the contribution of local green spaces in improving the quality of people's lives;
- Develop and implement a green space strategy;
- Carry out design reviews for failing or unsatisfactory spaces;
- Prepare a management plan for every major park, groups of smaller parks and types of open space such as allotments;
- Undertake a Best Value review of their park and green space services.

Local Framework

2.14 The following are all key local documents or strategies:

- The North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011
- The North Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy
- The North Wiltshire Leisure Facilities Strategy 2001 – 2007
- The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan, 2002
- The Community Strategy (In Preparation)

The North Wiltshire Local Plan 2011

2.15 This document is key to the achievement of sustainable development, balancing the need to make adequate provision for development whilst taking into account the need to protect the natural and built environment.

2.16 The Countryside and Open Space Strategy (with recommendations from this Study) will link to many of the sections within the Local Plan.

The North Wiltshire Playing Pitch Strategy

2.17 The Playing Pitch Strategy analyses current provision of facilities for several major team sports, identifies where there is latent demand for more facilities and identifies areas of shortfall.

2.18 There are very strong links between the Playing Pitch Strategy and this Study due to the nature of many playing fields in the District, and their use by the wider population.

The North Wiltshire Leisure Facilities Strategy 2001 - 2007

- 2.19 The Leisure Facilities Strategy is a strategic document that looks at the level of several types of leisure facilities in the District. It links to several other key Council documents and has several relevant sections including those on Sport, Countryside and Play facilities.

The Wiltshire Biodiversity Plan

- 2.20 The Wiltshire Biodiversity Action Plan, 2002. This vision document sets out positive action for increasing the biodiversity (the diversity of habitats and species) of the County of Wiltshire. The document sits within a framework of other biodiversity action plans (BAP's), including the UK BAP and the South West BAP. Within the plan are individual action plans for many different habitats and species including woodland, standing open water, hedgerows and bats. Whilst the plan makes reference to Prime Biodiversity Areas, of which the Cotswold and By Brook, Spye Park, North Wessex Downs, the Braydon Forest and the Cotswold Water Park are within the District, it recognises that biodiversity, and the possibility of increasing biodiversity is not restricted to these sites. From the plan there are four mechanisms to increase biodiversity that the Council should utilise, these being:

- Development control – to ensure that development does not have any adverse affects on habitats or species;
- Recreation and Leisure – ensure that any projects do not impinge on habitats or species;
- The Wiltshire and Swindon Biological Records Centre – adequate resourcing of the WSBRC to enable the collection of up to date and accessible information;
- Raising awareness.

- 2.21 Semi-natural greenspace, and other open space, has the potential to go some way to meeting the targets of the BAP if managed in a way likely to encourage wildlife.

North Wiltshire Community Strategy

- 2.22 The Local Government Act 2000 places a new (mandatory) Duty on all principal local authorities to prepare, in partnership with other organisations, a Community Strategy to promote the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area. The Community Strategy may, or may not, replace other strategies as an 'umbrella' strategy.
- 2.23 The Community Strategy needs to be prepared by a Local Strategic Partnership, bringing together councils, public, private and voluntary organisations and local communities. In areas with both a District and County Council, both authorities are jointly charged with the Duty to prepare a Community Strategy and need to work together to agree an approach.
- 2.24 The Strategy should provide the strategic direction and framework for action, based on a shared vision for the community, reflecting the local aspirations and priorities arising from the Community Planning process and should include agreed targets and milestones for action.
- 2.25 There will be a strong symbiotic relationship between both the Countryside and Open Space Strategy and this Study, and the Community Strategy.