



Topic Paper – Open Spaces

Cambridge City Council

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Key Evidence:

- National Planning Policy Framework (RD/NP/010)
- Cambridge City Council (2008). Cambridge Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2012 (RD/CC/210);
- Cambridgeshire Horizons (2008). The Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth (RD/HQ/030);
- Natural England (2009). Green Infrastructure Guidance (RD/NE/030);
- Cambridge City Council (2009). Cambridge Sports Strategy 2009 – 2013 (RD/CSF/140);
- Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (2011). The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature (RD/NP/110);
- Cambridgeshire Horizons (2011). Green Infrastructure Strategy for Cambridgeshire (RD/NE/020);
- Cambridge City Council (2006) Cambridge Local Plan 2006 (RD/AD/300);
- Cambridge City Council (2011). Open Space and Recreation Strategy (RD/NE/050);
- Cambridge City Council (2013). Summary of 51 Additional Sites Assessment as Protected Open Spaces (RD/NE/060);
- Cambridge City Council (2010). Cambridge Parks – Managing the City’s Asset 2010 to 2014 (RD/CSF/130).

1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

- 1.1 Open spaces support the social and environmental roles of sustainable development. They help support sports and social well-being by providing a place for social interaction, sports and recreational pursuits within the urban environment. They also provide local areas where the natural environment can flourish and help mitigate the effects of climate change. High quality open spaces are therefore important to achieving sustainable development.
- 1.2 The NPPF (RD/NP/010) recognises the important contribution that access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation makes to the health and well-being of communities. Paragraph 70 of the NPPF advises that planning policies should plan positively, including for the provision and

use of shared spaces to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments. Paragraph 73 of the NPPF recommends policies to be based on robust and up to date assessments of the needs for open space, sport and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. Such an assessment should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Paragraph 74 of the NPPF states the criteria that should be satisfied before existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields is developed. Paragraph 93 of the NPPF promotes measures to counter the impacts of climate change while paragraph 114 of the NPPF states that Local Planning Authorities should plan “positively for the creation, protection, enhancement and management of networks of biodiversity and green infrastructure.”

- 1.3 In summary, the NPPF seeks to support sustainable communities and in this context open spaces are valued for their social and environmental role in promoting the health and well-being of local communities, their social role in providing a local area for social interaction and their environmental role in supporting measures to alleviate the effects of climate change.

2 Cambridge Context

- 2.1 An essential aspect of Cambridge’s attractiveness as a place to live, work, study and visit is its character. This character stems from the interplay between its rich architecture and the spaces between buildings. The interface between the urban edge and the countryside is a key component of how the city is appreciated in its landscape.
- 2.2 It is therefore important that any new development respects the city’s character, the loss of open space worthy of protection (based upon the criteria in the Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission document) is minimised and the size of existing open spaces are retained, where possible to maintain their current function and their potential to support future complimentary uses, for example as part of a city-wide strategy to mitigate the effects of climate change.

3 Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011)

- 3.1 The council’s Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011) was completed to help inform the development of open space related policies and planning applications. The strategy comprises two main components. The first part of the development of the strategy is the Open Space and Recreation Assessment, which allows the council to identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and

recreational facilities in Cambridge. The assessment covered over 350 sites, including council owned and managed spaces, schools, and university and college land. Of the sites assessed, over 280 sites were considered worthy of designation as Protected Open Space.

- 3.2 The council's Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011) (RD/NE/050) identified deficits in the provision of open spaces at ward level. The delivery of new areas and retention of existing areas of open space and recreation is ever more important in wards with identified deficits in open space provision.

4 Development of open space-related policies

- 4.1 Following an approach which dates back to the Cambridge Local Plan 1996, the Cambridge Local Plan 2006 (RD/AD/300) includes two policies specifically relating to open space:

- Policy 3/8: Open Space and Recreation Provision Through New Development, ensuring residential development provides open space, where applicable; and
- Policy 4/2: Protection of Open Space, protecting both designated and undesignated open spaces for their recreational and/or environmental value that satisfy the assessment criteria for either recreational or environmental importance, including areas in the Cambridge Green Belt.

- 4.2 Continuing the council's approach to protecting and providing open space of environmental and/or recreational importance, four options for protection and provision of open space were consulted upon as part of the Issues and Options (2012) consultation. These were:

- Option 164 - Protection of open space;
- Option 165 - Maintain the current standards for open space and recreation provision;
- Option 166 – Maintain the current standards for open space and recreation provision; and
- Option 167 – On-site provision

- 4.3 Further detail on the key issues arising from Issues and Options consultation is outlined in the Statement of Consultation (RD/Sub/C/080).

- 4.4 The Issues and Options 2: Part 2 document (RD/LP/270) included the designations schedule (Annex L.3.1: Protected Open Spaces) which set out all of the open spaces currently designated as protected open space. During the consultation, additional open space sites were proposed for protection, assessed (according to the same criteria in the Cambridge Local Plan 2006 and Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission document) and a

number of the sites were considered worthy of designation as protected open space.

- 4.5 Paragraph 76 of the NPPF allows for the special protection of green areas of particular importance to local communities, with the introduction of the Local Green Space designation. As part of the Issues and Options 2: Part 2 consultation, the question of whether there were any areas that met the criteria for Local Green Space designation was asked. 17 separate sites for Local Green Space designation were submitted and for each, further information was requested to explain how each site met the Local Green Space criteria listed in the NPPF.
- 4.6 The proposed sites included existing natural green spaces, sports playing fields and other forms of recreational areas, including part of a public house garden many of which were already designated areas of protected open spaces. Those that were not already designated were assessed to determine their recreational and environmental qualities.
- 4.7 The majority of sites supported local amenity and recreational activities for various community groups while the remainder had many environmental qualities. This meant that they would be protected by the Local Plan policy to protect open spaces (Policy 67) which would continue to protect open spaces of recreational and, or environmental quality. The current policy of protecting open spaces is considered to have been successful in retaining these areas while providing a degree of flexibility in their replacement with enhanced facilities. This policy approach provides an established and consistent approach, applicable within the whole of the council's boundary. The introduction of a Local Green Space designation could restrict sustainable forms of development and introduce inconsistencies in the way in which open spaces are protected. These sites would continue to be protected by Policy 67: Protection of Open Space in the Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission document.
- 4.8 Policy 67 proposed by the council in the Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission document continues the existing approach of the current Local Plan 2006 (Policy 4/2: Protection of Open Space).
- 4.9 The loss of open space should continue to be resisted given the multi-functional role these areas currently perform and/or could perform in the future and because of the positive effect these areas have on the character of Cambridge. Policy 67 includes enhanced criteria relating to the satisfactory replacement of existing recreational open spaces. This takes the form of much clearer guidance as to what is regarded as satisfactory. For example, in terms of accessibility, the distance of the replacement open space needs to

be within walking distance of the original site, unless it can be proved that a more accessible site is proposed. Accessibility will not just be measured in terms of distance, but also in terms of the availability of the site to the general public. The council's current Open Space and Recreation Strategy and its successor documents will be used to guide the planning process regarding the loss of any open space.

- 4.10 Open spaces of environmental importance will continue to be protected. New developments that have the potential to affect an environmentally sensitive area of open space will need to provide satisfactory justification that the area's environmental qualities are not adversely affected. The proposed policy will apply to areas of the Cambridge Green Belt only where they satisfy the assessment criteria for recreational and/or environmental protection, e.g. sports pitches.
- 4.11 Where deficiencies of open space have already been identified as a local issue, the loss of any open space will be resisted unless it can be replaced in a suitably accessible location in the same ward.
- 4.12 The expansion of local schools should enhance both the quality and quantity of open space provision, rather than leading to a net loss. School playgrounds will continue to be protected to ensure incremental alterations to school premises do not lead to a reduction in school play provision.
- 4.13 Policy 67 does not prevent the expansion of educational institutions. The proposed approach allows new educational buildings on parts of the site that are not in playing field use and could not readily be used as such (e.g. small areas of amenity grassland separated from the main playing field) that have no significant environmental value. This can be justified on the grounds that playing fields/sports facilities have separate policy advice within the NPPF (Paragraphs 73 and 74). With the requirement to protect existing open spaces, the policy encourages proposals to consider ways of increasing school capacity without compromising play areas. With increasing use of existing educational sites, the demand for the use of open spaces will only increase with increased pupil/student capacity. Proposals will therefore need to take a long-term perspective and future-proof proposals to increase pupil capacity without preventing future expansion.
- 4.14 Sport England has been consulted on the development of Policy 67. A number of amendments were made to this policy during its development as a result of their comments, specifically in relation to the protection of playing fields and sports facilities where educational development is proposed on school, college and university grounds.

- 4.15 In summary, given the significant role of open spaces in Cambridge, there is a clear need to increase the protection of these spaces of recreational and/or environmental importance. However, some degree of flexibility for educational, college and universities grounds is recognised where meeting an educational need, while enhancing the remaining spaces and preventing the loss of playing fields.
- 4.16 The council's Policy 68: Open space and recreation through new development in the Cambridge Local Plan 2014 Proposed Submission document will follow the existing approach of the Cambridge Local Plan 2006 which requires the delivery of open spaces with residential development however it will also have much greater focus on the delivery of actual on-site provision, where appropriate. While the quality of open spaces can be improved with further investment, new areas of open space are required to mitigate the impact of additional residential development in the city, particularly in those areas with existing deficiencies in provision. In areas where a deficiency in open space has previously been identified, on-site provision of open space should be the norm within new residential developments and compliant with the council's Open Space and Recreation Strategy and its successor documents.
- 4.17 The draft Planning Obligations Strategy Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) 2014 (RD/T/240) includes further detail on the implementation of the open space requirements, as set out in Appendix I of the Cambridge Local Plan 2014: Proposed Submission document secured through planning obligations.
- 4.18 The council's Open Space and Recreation Strategy (2011) and its successor documents should be used to guide the planning process on the provision of open space by continuing to inform the masterplanning process for the urban extensions and through the consideration of all new development. Where possible, any new green spaces should be multi-functional and support the objectives of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy (RD/NE/020). The proposed policy includes the recommendations in the strategy document regarding the quantum of provision for each type of open space.
- 4.19 In summary, the policy approach is influenced by the council's evidence base and should therefore meet the needs of Cambridge. The increased provision for informal open space and allotments city-wide should ensure the delivery of sufficient open space with new residential development. More specific emphasis on the delivery of open space on small sites from the outset of their design should ensure all efforts are made to deliver new open spaces.