

## OPEN SPACE STRATEGY – SCOPING REPORT

### WEAR VALLEY DISTRICT COUNCIL'S OPEN SPACE STRATEGY – SCOPING REPORT

#### Introduction

1. Wear Valley District Council is preparing to undertake an Open Space and Recreational Needs Assessment, in line with current Government Planning Policy. From this assessment, a District wide Open Space Strategy and Local Development Document forming part of the Council's Local Development framework and containing relevant planning policies and allocations relating to open space, sport and recreation will be developed. The strategy will also contribute to and link with other key strategic documents such as the district's Community Plan, Wear Valley District Council's Council Plan, Durham County Council's Biodiversity Action Plan, A.O.N.B. Management Plan etc. The strategy must also set out;
  - An agreed vision for the strategy
  - The policy objectives which flow from the vision
  - Action Plans which set out means of delivery of the strategy

#### Purpose of Report

2. The purpose of this report is to identify a number of key issues involved in undertaking an assessment of open space within the District and establish a methodology for preparing the strategy. While it is intended that an agreed methodology will closely follow the advice set out Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17) and it's Companion Guide, it is important to appreciate that the document is not purely a planning document and will have a wider remit. In this context, it is important that appropriate representations are made from those wishing to have an involvement in the production of the strategy as early as possible, setting out how they wish to see the strategy develop.

#### Definition and Typology

3. PPG17 sets out a typology of what areas of open space are to be included within an assessment. It is proposed that the District's Open Space Assessment will be based upon this typology, comprising:
  - parks and gardens;
  - natural and Semi-Natural Greenspaces;
  - green Corridors;
  - outdoor Sports Facilities;
  - amenity Greenspaces;
  - provision for child and young people, including play areas;
  - allotment, community gardens and urban farms;
  - civic spaces;
  - cemeteries, churchyards and other burial grounds;
  - accessible countryside in urban fringe areas

## **Expected Outcomes;**

- A Study Brief
- An Open Space Assessment (Quality/Quantity/Accessibility) upon which local standards will be formulated
- Public Consultations
- Development of Strategic Objectives and methods of delivery (Action Plans)
- A Monitoring and Review Process

## **Key Tasks**

4. In accordance with the guidance provided by PPG17 and its companion guide, there are 5 steps to producing a strategy. It is proposed that Wear Valley District Council's Strategy follows this procedure. This comprises:
  1. Identification of Local Needs;
  2. Quantity and Qualitative Audit;
  3. Establishment of Local Standards;
  4. Application of Local Standards; and
  5. Policy Formulation

## **Key Issues for Scope**

5. In the context of the five stages outlined above, the principle factors in establishing the value and use of the strategy will be determined by stages 1 & 2, with Key Stages 3, 4 and 5 being interlinked with the preparation of the new development plan (Local Development Framework) for the District. On this basis, it is crucial that the brief for undertaking these two preliminary stages is comprehensive and takes account of the issues likely to arise at later stages. This scoping report is therefore focused upon undertaking these first two stages.

## **Audit Data**

6. The Open Space Strategy should be primarily but not exclusively focused on the urban areas and population concentrations. However, given the rural nature of the District it is proposed that the settlements are defined in terms of built up form extents. This definition will have NO statutory planning basis and will only be indicative of the survey area. It may also be necessary in certain locations to include the Urban Fringe Areas, as these are often under pressure for development.
7. The audit will include collecting qualitative and quantitative data. In this respect, it will be important to identify the most appropriate resource to undertake specific surveys and also identify whether any of the information already exists and is available to the team.

8. Initially all areas of open space within the built up extents will be included within the study although at the initial stages this will not include roadside verges unless they make a significant contribution to the area, or private gardens. If it is considered appropriate, the study can be widened to include these areas at future stages.
9. It is proposed that the following information will be gathered on each site:

### **Quantitative Data**

- PPG17 typology based upon it's primary use. Secondary uses will also be recorded where appropriate;
- Size and location;
- Planning status;
- Public accessibility; and
- Facilities;

it is anticipated that most of the above quantitative data can be obtained by means of a "desktop" exercise together with site/fieldwork where appropriate.

### **Qualitative Data**

- Quality/Condition;
- Threats;
- Opportunities;
- Function;
- Biodiversity; and
- Value

### **Consultation Process**

10. It is vitally important to consult both users and non-users of areas of open space and recreation. The Consultation Process will need to conform to the requirements of the new development plan system and is intended to run in parallel throughout the process which will see the production of the Open Space Strategy and will need to focus on a range of people. Mechanisms to engage the population will need to be developed. Initial investigations have indicated that some of the following methods could be used.
  - District News Questionnaire;
  - Youth Forums;
  - Sporting Representatives;
  - Community Group Representatives;
  - Citizens Panel(s);
  - Local Strategic Partnerships;
  - Household Surveys;
  - Workshops;
  - Satisfaction Surveys; and
  - Disability Focus Groups
  - Council Website (including appropriate links)

11. The Consultation Process is essential to the development of the strategy and planning policies and will therefore require an extensive amount of thought and engagement.

### **Ownership of Strategy**

12. Ownership of the strategy is crucial in determining the weight that can be attached to it, both within and external to the planning process. Multiple-ownership will also facilitate a greater exchange of information and resources in the production of the strategy.
13. It is proposed that the strategy be co-ordinated by the Community Services Department of Wear Valley District Council but be developed through a steering group of representatives, as illustrated below.
  - Regeneration (WVDC)
  - Community Services (WVDC)
  - Central Resources (WVDC)
  - Management Support Unit (WVDC)
  - Chairman of Community Services
  - North Pennines A.O.N.B. Partnership
  - Community/LSP representative
  - Groundwork West Durham
  - Sones Landscaping
  - Durham County Council

The above list may be amended/added to as appropriate during the exercise.

Additionally, a "Project Board" will be created which will more directly oversee the progress of the project. This Project Board will, initially, be made up of:

Acting Director of Community Services	(Wear Valley DC)
Planning Officer	(Wear Valley DC)
Groundwork West Durham representative	(Groundwork West Durham)
Acting Head of Community & Cultural Services	(Wear Valley DC)
Policy & Performance Improvement Manager	(Wear Valley DC)

The delivery of the project by this Project Board will be split between the executive role and the project planning role. The former will be undertaken by the Acting Director of Community Services (WVDC), the latter by the Groundwork West Durham representative.

14. It is anticipated that in addition to directing the strategy's development the function of the steering group will be primarily concerned with the sharing of information. From preliminary investigations it is expected that much of the information required or contacts needed to develop the strategy are already available from the members above.
15. Given the above, the sharing of existing information will significantly reduce the work required and enhance the quality of the strategy contents. It is proposed that the steering group would need to meet approximately every 2 months or as deemed appropriate.

16. In addition to the main steering group it is expected that there would be a second tier of interested parties that will wish to be involved in the project such as local partnerships, resident's groups or specialist interest groups. It is important that these people are not excluded from the process. It is likely to be most practical if these groups are involved separately from the key steering group through specific forums.

### **Conformity and Integration with Existing Strategies**

17. In producing an Open Space Strategy and Action Plan for the District it is crucial that the best use is made of existing resources, strategies and delivery mechanisms to minimise additional burdens on staff resources or conflicts with existing strategies and corporate objectives.

### **Timescale**

18. While it is expected that the project will have a number of drivers the strategy will be required to form part of the Council's evidence in preparing its Local Development Framework. On this basis, it is anticipated that the study period will be some 18 months.