

7.0 LEISURE AND RECREATION

Objectives

- to resolve any deficiencies in the quantity, quality and accessibility of sports, open spaces and recreation facilities;
- to protect or enhance open space and recreation provision that is, or has the potential to be, of value to the community;
- to locate open space, sports and recreation facilities where they are accessible by a choice of modes of transport and especially by foot, bicycle or public transport;
- to provide good quality open space and built recreational facilities as an integral part of new or expanding communities;

7.1 Leisure and recreation contributes directly to regeneration by improving health, productivity and quality of life for individuals and communities and indirectly through saving in the cost of providing health care and a reduction in crime and vandalism. It can change the image of a city and lead to increased inward investment.

7.2 The City Council has a key role to play in ensuring that there is a comprehensive network of facilities and services available to meet recreational needs of all members of the community, including the elderly, families with young children and persons with disabilities. The Council aims to achieve this by providing facilities directly, by encouraging and supporting initiatives from the private sector and voluntary bodies and by developing partnership arrangements where appropriate. To reflect this the Local Plan provides for informal outdoor recreation, including parks and open spaces and for active sports and recreation, both outdoor and indoor.

7.3 As part of the forthcoming Local Development Framework the Council intends to publish a Supplementary Planning Document that will provide further detail on the implementation of policies on outdoor recreational facilities in the City. This will be complemented by an Audit of those facilities.

Strategic Guidance

7.4 Government Policy (Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Sport and Recreation) aims to protect existing sport, open space and recreation facilities and create new facilities which are accessible by a choice of modes of transport.

7.5 Regional Guidance states that recreational open spaces and playing fields should be protected and new community sports facilities should be provided particularly in areas of identified underprovision, or major new development

7.6 The Structure Plan First Review aims to encourage the provision of as wide a range of recreational facilities as possible, in locations fully accessible to the communities they serve, where this is consistent with the need to conserve the environmental quality of the area.

Informal Recreation

7.7 Informal recreation refers to activities such as walking, cycling, riding, landscape and wildlife enjoyment and picnicking. The nature of informal recreation is such that the activity itself, and appreciation of the setting in which it takes place, cannot be separated. Visitors may enjoy attractive landscapes which do not have public access by viewing them from locations where public access is permitted e. g. a viewpoint, a footpath through an area or from nearby land. The landscape quality of the whole of an informal recreation area can, therefore, be important to the quality of experience even though permitted physical access may only exist over part.

7.8 There is often a close relationship between the informal recreation value of a site and its wildlife value. A site that is rich in wildlife will make a significant contribution to visitors' enjoyment of the locality and such a site will probably have a visually interesting habitat.

7.9 Seven informal recreation areas are identified in this Plan. These are described as Valley Parks but also may include, within them, open land, ridges and hills adjoining the valleys. All contain a mixture of land that is in private and public ownership. Generally speaking there is unrestricted access across land in public ownership and limited access onto private land.

7.10 The Valley Parks are distributed around the City. Their proximity to residential and business areas means that they are readily accessible, by foot or cycle, to a very large proportion of Exeter's residents and can be visited at all times of day, for long or short visits. This is in contrast to the informal recreational areas that lie further afield, such as Haldon Forest or Woodbury Common which require motorised transport and more time to visit.

7.11 The City's Valley Parks are managed, as far as possible, to maintain and create a landscape/ambience that can usefully be described as 'countryside in the City'. They are, in both a literal and metaphorical sense, 'green lungs' within the urban setting. They can provide people with the opportunity to relax, unwind and 're-create' themselves in an environment that contrasts to the stresses of urban living. These areas therefore make a significant contribution to the quality of life of those who live and work in Exeter.

7.12 Overall management will aim to protect and enhance the landscape and wildlife habitats, improve access, both physical and visual, where appropriate and develop environmental education opportunities. Improved footpath and bridleway links between the informal recreation areas and into adjoining countryside will be sought, through agreement on access. The only forms of development which are appropriate within these areas concern outdoor recreation, agriculture or forestry.

7.13 Access to informal recreation sites in Exeter is mainly provided in the Valley Parks and at Stoke Woods. The public rights of way network (see 7.24) is also important both in the Valley Parks and in the countryside around the fringes of the City (see 11.4-11.14). This is augmented by permissive footpath and bridleway routes

that have been created, and continue to be established, as opportunities arise, including a circular walking route, the ‘green circle’ (see 7.25 and 9.19, Policy T4). A circular cycle route which links the Valley Parks is also proposed (see 9.29, Policy T5).

7.14 The Council aims to achieve the overall objectives through:

- (i) management and maintenance of sites to achieve the desired ‘balance’ between informal recreation, landscape and wildlife, depending on the nature of the site and the priorities for the locality;
- (ii) working in partnership with organisations and community groups;
- (iii) provision of advice and grants to landowners to encourage appropriate landscape, access and wildlife enhancements;
- (iv) phasing of activities, both within particular sites and across the City as a whole;
- (v) recognition that there is often synergy between different ‘uses’ on particular sites - for example, there are close links between the creation of new landscape features and enhancing conditions for wildlife and there may be the potential for enhancing opportunities for environmental education when planning new access routes.

7.15 The Valley Parks make a significant contribution to the landscape setting of the City and, in addition to Policy L1 below, are subject to Landscape Policy LS1.

The Valley Parks

- (i) Riverside Valley Park

7.16 Stretching from Cowley Bridge to Topsham, this is the largest of the Valley Parks. The landscape character, and wildlife value, of the Park alters significantly along its length, from grazing meadows in the north, through the busy Quay/Canal Basin area (see Key Proposal 6) and then southwards to become part of the Exe Estuary Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is a popular informal recreational area that is accessible from many parts of Exeter and it forms a continuous wildlife corridor through the City.

- (ii) Duryard Valley Park

7.17 The matrix of meadows and woodland here are host to a wide range of wildlife that thrives in the quiet valleys. All the roads within the estate are private but responsible bona fide walkers are not prevented from using them. The picnic site off Pennsylvania Road affords fine views across the Valley Park towards Dartmoor. Within the Park is the Belvidere Meadows Local Nature Reserve.

- (iii) Mincinglake Valley Park

7.18 This ‘finger’ of countryside extends down from Stoke Hill between the residential areas of Mincinglake Road and Mile Lane. The lower valley is wooded whilst the upper part comprises meadows that are rich in wild flowers, butterflies and

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other insects. The Park has a system of well laid out paths and there is easy access from adjacent residential areas.

(iv) Ludwell Valley Park

7.19 This attractive area of undulating farmland is located between Wonford and Rydon Lane and is an 'island' of countryside surrounded by residential and office development. There are fine views from here across the City and down the Exe Estuary. There are pedestrian access points on all sides of the Park.

(v) Alphington/Whitestone Valley Park

7.20 This western ridge-line of the City comprises some splendid 'rural' valleys and ridge-lines that offer excellent views of the City although access is restricted to footpaths, bridleways and lanes. Within the park is the Barley Valley Local Nature Reserve.

(vi) Savoy Hill Valley Park

7.21 A relatively small Valley Park. The northern portion comprises a large floristically rich meadow and the southern section is a partially wooded, narrow valley. For such a small area the Park is surprisingly rich in wildlife and the proximity of a large residential area makes the locality particularly valuable for informal recreation.

(vii) Hoopern Valley

7.22 This is the only area of natural open space in the St Davids/St James areas of Exeter. It comprises a steeply sided and partly wooded valley that is close to densely populated urban areas and the University of Exeter. It forms an important wildlife refuge and supports, amongst other species, deer, badgers, grass snakes, butterflies and a wide range of birds. There is scope for significant improvement to the habitats found there. Public access is currently limited to the public footpaths that run alongside and across the valley. Public awareness of the locality is likely to increase now as the City's 'green circle' walking route (see 7.25 and 9.19, Policy T4) follows the north western side of the valley. Designation as a Valley Park, along with appropriate enhancements to increase its value for informal recreation and biodiversity, would complement the current distribution of Valley Parks around the City.

Stoke Woods

7.23 Most of this semi-natural ancient woodland, to the north of the City (see 11.4-11.5), is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. As joint managers of the woodland to the west of Pennsylvania Road, the City Council and Forestry Commission have encouraged public access and provided picnic sites and car parking. Like the Valley Parks this is an important informal recreation area. The woods to the east of Pennsylvania Road are in private ownership with no public access. The Council may wish to extend public access, through management and access

agreements, in order to take advantage of the recreational and educational potential provided this does not conflict with the conservation of the area.

L1: MEASURES TO ENHANCE THE VALLEY PARKS WILL BE IMPLEMENTED BASED UPON ACHIEVING A BALANCE BETWEEN THE AIMS OF CONSERVATION, RECREATION, PUBLIC ACCESS AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION. DEVELOPMENT WHICH WOULD HARM EXISTING OR POTENTIAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR INFORMAL RECREATION IN THE VALLEY PARKS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED.

L2: THE HOOPERN VALLEY IS DESIGNATED AS A VALLEY PARK.

Public Rights of Way and Bridleways

7.24 There are a number of footpaths and bridleways in Exeter that are statutorily protected as rights of way and shown on the definitive map, which is maintained by the County Council, as highway authority. The City Council undertakes maintenance work on behalf of the County Council under agency arrangements to ensure paths are kept clear and signed. Pedestrians, horse riders and cyclists are permitted to use a number of paths owned by the City Council and other landowners, although not designated as public highways.

7.25 The Council has largely implemented a circular walking route known as the ‘green circle’, by linking together rights of way and permissive paths (see 9.19, Policy T4). Once completed, it will be possible to add loops in future to create shorter circular walks and provide more choice. The ‘green circle’ forms part of a network of walking routes identified through the Exeter Walking Project. This is a joint initiative of the City and County Councils with the national charity, Sustrans, aimed at increasing the level of walking as a sustainable mode of transport.

Protection of Open Space

7.26 Due to the limited amount of developable land left within the built-up area, open space becomes even more important as spaces between buildings are developed. This includes those green areas not normally available as public open space such as school playing fields (see 7.29 to 7.36), allotments (see 7.44 to 7.46), cemeteries and church grounds. Through this local plan the Council is promoting the development of previously-developed land within the City where it can be satisfactorily accommodated but development which would result in town cramming, especially in areas of open space deficiency, will not be permitted (see ‘Provision of Open Space and Children’s Play Areas’: 13.41 – 13.46 and Policy DG5).

L3: DEVELOPMENT ON OPEN SPACE WILL ONLY BE PERMITTED IF:

(a) THE LOSS OF OPEN SPACE WOULD NOT HARM THE CHARACTER OF THE AREA; AND

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- (b) THE OPEN SPACE DOES NOT FULFIL A VALUABLE RECREATIONAL, COMMUNITY, ECOLOGICAL OR AMENITY ROLE; AND
- (c) THERE IS ADEQUATE OPEN SPACE IN THE AREA; OR
- (d) THE LOSS OF OPEN SPACE IS OUTWEIGHED BY ITS REPLACEMENT IN THE AREA BY OPEN SPACE OF AT LEAST EQUIVALENT RECREATIONAL, COMMUNITY ECOLOGICAL OR AMENITY VALUE (INCLUDING, IN PARTICULAR, THE PROVISION AND ENHANCEMENT OF EQUIPPED PLAY SPACE).

Sport and Active Recreation

7.27 Over recent years considerable improvements have been achieved in facilities for athletics, football, bowls, rugby, tennis and swimming.

7.28 A substantial investment in sports facilities has been made by Exeter University with the intention of becoming a focus for sport locally, regionally and nationally. In particular, the University have provided high quality facilities for cricket, football and rugby at Exeter Road, near Topsham and has established an indoor tennis centre on the Stretham campus, adjacent to the University's sports hall. The City Council recognises the clear economic and social benefits that the University provision will bring to the City and to the region.

Playing Fields

7.29 Playing fields are a significant resource for sport but they are under constant pressure for development. Once developed they are likely to be lost for ever. The Government places particular emphasis on the protection of playing fields and stresses that local authorities should carry out local assessments of demand.

7.30 Accordingly, the existing supply (the current number of pitches) has been compared with the existing expressed demand (number of teams) using as a framework the Playing Pitch Methodology advocated by Sport England and the National Playing Fields Association. Playing fields included in the assessment are not separately identified on the Proposals Map. They fall within the 'Open Space', 'Valley Park' and 'Landscape Setting' designations and are part of school sites.

7.31 The Playing Pitch Methodology makes a distinction between a playing field which is defined as 'the whole of the site which encompasses at least one playing pitch' and a playing pitch which is defined as 'areas reserved and maintained as outdoor playing space principally for formal organised pitch sports (football, cricket, rugby and hockey)'. A playing pitch therefore excludes areas of land which may have an important function as kick about areas and excludes pitches which are too small to be used for formal (league) games. A qualitative assessment is also made, to include factors such as pitch quality, patterns of play, availability and accessibility and the strength of each sport.

7.32 The Playing Pitch Strategy sets out a target for playing pitch provision of 1.21 hectares for every 1,000 people. This is set within the National Playing Fields Association standard for outdoor sport provision (including pitches, greens, courts, athletics tracks and other sports, but excluding golf and water sports) of 1.6 to 1.8 hectares per 1,000 persons. Included in the standard are facilities owned by local authorities and within the educational sector which, as a matter of policy and practice, are made available for public use, as well as facilities within the voluntary, private, industrial or commercial sectors serving the outdoor recreation needs of their members or the public. In Exeter there are around 133 hectares (329 acres) of outdoor sports provision and approximately 72 hectares (178 acres) of playing pitch provision.

The provision in hectares per 1,000 population for both outdoor sports and playing pitches is as follows:

	N.P.F.A standard	Exeter provision
Outdoor sports provision	1.6 – 1.8	1.18
Playing pitch provision	1.21	0.64

7.33 Overall there appears to be a marginal deficiency with a particular shortfall in Pennsylvania, Duryard, St James, St David's, Newtown, St Leonard's and Polsloe. Facilities are concentrated in Alphington, Countess Wear and Pinhoe which provides benefits of access and shared facilities. Generally it is not necessary to ensure city wide provision as access and facilities can be shared but facilities for youth games should be as near as possible to the local area of demand.

7.34 The City Council, therefore, aims to:

- protect existing playing fields;
- encourage greater community access to playing fields currently under private or educational ownership;
- encourage improvements to the overall quality of playing fields;
- secure new playing fields and ancillary facilities or enhancements to playing fields, including provision for maintenance, as part of new development so that existing deficiencies are not exacerbated.

7.35 New residential development of 10 or more dwellings, should make new provision based on the Sport England target of 1.2 hectares of playing pitches for every 1,000 people (equivalent to approximately 450 dwellings). This will frequently need to be provided off site, possibly through a commuted payment. In appropriate cases the contribution will be used to enhance the capacity of existing pitches through, for example, provision of ancillary facilities or enhanced drainage. A Supplementary Planning Document will be prepared as part of the forthcoming Local Development Framework to advise on how the policies will be applied to improve and protect the City's open space facilities (see also open space requirements: paras 13.41 – 13.46, Policy DG5).

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7.36 Proposals for development that would result in the loss of a playing field will be assessed to determine whether the loss would cause harm to recreation opportunities. Examples of where harm would not occur include where:

- (a) the proposed development is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility which would provide sufficient benefit to outweigh the loss of the playing field; or
- (b) there is an excess of playing field provision in the City and the site has no special significance to the interest of sport; or
- (c) the proposal affects only land incapable of forming, or forming part of, a playing pitch and does not result in the loss, or prevent the use, of a playing pitch; or
- (d) replacement provision is made of at least equivalent community benefit where it will be reasonably conveniently located to serve the target catchment population.

L4: RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF 10 OR MORE DWELLINGS SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROVISION OF YOUTH AND ADULT PLAY SPACE (DIRECTLY RELATED TO, AND NECESSARY FOR, THE DEVELOPMENT) HAVING REGARD TO THE TYPE OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED AND CONSIDERED AGAINST A STANDARD LEVEL OF PROVISION OF PLAYING PITCHES OF 1.2 HECTARES FOR EVERY 450 DWELLINGS.

L5: DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF A PLAYING FIELD WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD HARM RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA.

Intensive Use Facilities

7.37 Synthetic Turf Pitches and Multi-Use Games Areas can provide a significant increase in opportunities for sport. To protect residential amenity the Council will take into account the proximity to housing, ambient levels of noise and light, proposed usage arrangements and traffic generation. Floodlights should be installed so that spillage of light is kept to a minimum. Conditions may be attached to a planning permission which restricts the hours of use but the viability of the operation will be taken into account.

L6: PROPOSALS FOR SYNTHETIC TURF PITCHES OR MULTI USE GAMES AREAS AND FOR ASSOCIATED FLOODLIGHTING WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT THE LEVELS OF NOISE, LIGHT, USAGE AND TRAFFIC GENERATION WILL NOT HARM LOCAL RESIDENTIAL AMENITY.

Local Sporting Facilities

7.38 There is a wide range of public, private and community outdoor resources in the City. These are often located within residential areas and include courts, greens and surfaces for tennis, basketball, and bowls and other similar sports. These facilities are important to the quality of life of the local population and often contribute to the environmental character of an area. They also contribute to vitality and sustainability of urban living. Proposals for development that would result in the loss of local sporting facilities will be assessed to determine whether the loss would cause harm to sports opportunities in the area. Examples of where harm would not occur include where there is no demand or where alternative provision, of the same or better standard, is available or can be provided.

L7: DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF SPORTING FACILITIES WHICH SERVE A LOCAL AREA WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD HARM SPORTS OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA.

Indoor Sports Facilities

7.39 The Council aims to ensure that a wide range of accessible indoor sports facilities is provided throughout the City. This will include facilities for informal community activities as well as for competition, and, where appropriate, sub- regional and regional specialist facilities.

7.40 Commercial health facilities, such as major fitness suites or gymnasiums are making an increasing contribution to meeting the demand for health facilities. There may also be opportunities for commercial sports facilities. Such provision must be conveniently accessible by a choice of transport and should, ideally, be located within or close to existing shopping centres or leisure facilities or in association with education facilities. Small indoor centres are most appropriate at local and neighbourhood level. The provision of new facilities will be considered as part of all major development schemes.

7.41 Sports facilities provided at school sites can be used to great advantage by the wider community. There are direct benefits to young people in strengthening the links between their involvement in sport during school time and their continued participation in their own time. Many schools are already well located in terms of access on foot or cycle or by public transport. Other opportunities exist through the use of the University and College facilities and in opening up company and commercial facilities. To accommodate community users some sites may require enhancements such as additional parking or changing rooms or the provision of independent access.

L8: INDOOR SPORTS CENTRE DEVELOPMENT WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:

(i) IT WILL NOT HARM LOCAL AMENITY;

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- (ii) SAFE AND CONVENIENT ACCESS BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT, WALKING AND CYCLING, AND BY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, IS AVAILABLE OR CAN BE PROVIDED AND THE DEVELOPMENT:
 - (a) IS WITHIN OR CLOSE TO THE EXISTING SHOPPING CENTRES; OR
 - (b) IS ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING MAJOR LEISURE AND RECREATION FACILITIES; OR
 - (c) IS PART OF A LARGE SCALE COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT SCHEME; OR
 - (d) IS ASSOCIATED WITH EXISTING OR PROPOSED EDUCATION SITES.

Sports Stadia

7.42 Within the City there are two sports stadia which accommodate professional or first class amateur sporting activities - St James Park (home to Exeter City Football Club) and the County Ground (home to Exeter Rugby Football Club and Exeter Speedway). Following the Taylor report, PPG17 highlighted the inadequacy of existing stadia, and the need for improvements in terms of public safety, as an issue appropriate to be addressed in the preparation of local plans. Improvements to St James Park are underway. Permission has been granted for a new rugby stadium adjoining the M5, at Sandy Park.

7.43 These facilities, together with the Arena athletics ground, contribute to the overall economic vitality of the City. In determining planning applications for development which would enable improvements to the stadia to be implemented, the community benefits arising from such a development will be taken into account whilst recognising important amenity considerations such as noise, the impact of floodlighting and traffic generation. The Council will also take into account the advantages of retaining major spectator sports within urban areas which are easily accessible to large areas of the resident population.

L9: DEVELOPMENT ON LAND AT, ADJOINING, OR ASSOCIATED WITH, ST. JAMES PARK, OR THE COUNTY GROUND, OR THE ARENA WILL BE PERMITTED PROVIDED THAT:

- (a) THE PROPOSAL RETAINS AND SUPPORTS THE PRINCIPAL SPORTING ACTIVITY;
- (b) IT WILL NOT HARM LOCAL AMENITY BY VIRTUE OF NOISE, FLOODLIGHTING, CAR PARKING, TRAFFIC GENERATION OR OTHER DISTURBANCE.

Allotments

7.44 The City Council has a statutory obligation to provide sufficient allotments to serve the needs of local residents. There are 27 statutory sites within the City providing 1,225 plots and one private site with 17 plots. In total there are approximately 40 hectares (100 acres) of land in allotments equivalent to 0.36 hectares for every 1,000 people. There is a very localised catchment with approximately 80% of allotment holders living within one mile of their site. Nationally the average for provision is one plot for every 65 households but in Exeter the ratio is one plot for every 31 households.

7.45 Apart from a few sites where there are particular problems the demand for and supply of allotments is approximately in balance. There is evidence that there is considerable latent demand that will respond to promotion and that demand may increase particularly from women and single parents. Location is important since the majority of plot holders wish to live within walking distance of their plot. The wards of Duryard, St. James, Newtown, St David's, St Leonard's and Polsloe are not well served by allotments but there are few opportunities for improvement. These matters are being addressed through the preparation of an Allotment Strategy.

7.46 Proposals for development that would result in the loss of allotments will be assessed to determine whether the loss would cause harm to allotment provision in the area. Examples of where harm would not occur include where:

- (a) there is an excess of allotment provision in the area; or
- (b) replacement provision is made, of at least equivalent quality, where it will be reasonably conveniently located to serve the existing plot holders; or
- (c) overriding community benefits are achieved.

L10: DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD RESULT IN THE LOSS OF ALLOTMENTS WILL NOT BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD HARM ALLOTMENT PROVISION IN THE AREA.

