

Introduction and Background

The study

- 1.1 During December 2007 Bromsgrove District Council (the Council) appointed PMP to undertake an open space, recreation and sport local needs assessment and playing pitch strategy across the district.
- 1.2 The open space study is undertaken in accordance with Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, 2002) (PPG17) and its Companion Guide.
- 1.3 The Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) is undertaken in accordance with the methodology endorsed by Sport England and set out in the guidance document “Towards a Level Playing Field” (2002).
- 1.4 The assessment will form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF), in particular supporting the policies of the core strategy and other Development Plan Documents (DPD).
- 1.5 Other specific objectives of the study include:
 - to undertake an audit of existing open space, sport and recreation facilities across Bromsgrove
 - to identify local needs and aspirations through consultation, a strategic review and a review of existing provision standards
 - to recommend standards of provision (quantity, quality and accessibility) in accordance with PPG17
 - to provide evidence to inform the future enhancement and management of open space, sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.6 The District Council currently manages over 70 open spaces in the District including a range of parks, sports pitches and play areas. The findings of this work will enable the Council to adopt a clear vision and identify priorities for the future based on local needs.
- 1.7 Parish Councils and voluntary groups are also key providers of open space, sport and recreation facilities in Bromsgrove. This assessment considers facilities in all ownership and will encourage partnership working on the future provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities in the District.

Why public open space?

- 1.8 Open space and recreation provision in Bromsgrove has an important role to play in supporting the implementation of both national objectives and more locally in the achievement of key council priorities including investing in children and young people, maintaining and enhancing quality of life and responding to the needs and aspirations of the ageing population.



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- 1.9 The provision of open spaces, and sport and recreation facilities is becoming increasingly important and the contributions it can make to both national and local priorities are recognised. The benefit to local communities is reflected in the Park Life Report (Greenspace, June 2007), which indicates that 92% of all those questioned had visited a park within the last month.
- 1.10 PPG17 states that 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.
- 1.11 The May 2007 White Paper highlights minimising climate change and the protection of the environment as some of the key challenges to be addressed through the planning system in future years. The Bromsgrove LDF Core Strategy newsletter reinforces this, identifying the protection of the environment as important. The appropriate provision and protection of open space will be instrumental in achieving this objective.
- 1.12 The importance of promoting health is emphasised through recent pressure on Local Planning Authorities to combat rising obesity through the appropriate design of buildings and the local environment, including open spaces.
- 1.13 The provision of high quality open space has also proved effective in combating crime, both through encouraging community involvement and gaining respect from local residents. In contrast, lower quality sites can attract misuse and encourage anti social behaviour.

Function and benefits of open space

- 1.14 Open spaces can provide a number of functions within the urban fabric of towns and villages, for example, opportunities for play and informal recreation, a landscaping buffer within and between the built environment and/or a habitat for the promotion of biodiversity.
- 1.15 While all sites have a primary purpose, many open spaces perform secondary functions, for example outdoor sports facilities offer an amenity value in addition to facilitating sport and recreation.
- 1.16 Changing social and economic circumstances, different work and leisure practices, more sophisticated consumer tastes and higher public expectations have placed new demands on open spaces. They have to serve more diverse communities and face competition from various developers. While the provision of open spaces can be challenging, open spaces can also promote community cohesion, encourage community development and stimulate partnerships between the public and private sector.

- 1.17 Parks and open spaces are more accessible to a wide range of people than many other sport 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 therefore essential to an ideal, sustainable and thriving community. The Park Life Report (Green Space June 2007) highlighted that 83% of those surveyed feel that parks are the focal point of a community. Furthermore, the Sanders Park User Satisfaction Survey 2004 indicated that over 61% of respondents to the survey visit Sanders Park weekly or more than often, emphasising the value of parks within the community.

Pitch Provision – The Context

- 1.18 By virtue of statutory instrument made in 1996, Sport England is a statutory consultee on proposals for development that affect playing fields, land used as playing fields at any time in the last five years which remains undeveloped, or land which is identified for use as a playing field in a development plan. All applications that local planning authorities are minded to approve, but have attracted an objection from Sport England, will be referred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for consideration.
- 1.19 The local planning authority must notify Sport England when a relevant planning application is received. Data stored by Sport England on statutory consultations since 1999 reveals the increasing pressure that is being placed upon pitches throughout the country. Sport England therefore advocates the preparation of detailed playing pitch strategies investigating supply and demand.
- 1.20 The loss of playing pitches also remains a real political issue for the government. Sport England, the NPFA and the CCPR demonstrated their commitment to enhancing playing pitch provision by commissioning a review and updating of the 1991 Playing Pitch Strategy. The new document 'Towards a Level Playing Field: A manual for the production of a playing pitch strategy' was produced in July 2005. The In 2003/04 DCMS released statistics indicating that for the first time applications for development on playing fields were resulting in less non-sports projects and more new sports facilities and pitches. During 2003 – 2004, 959 applications were approved for development, 590 involved projects that would greatly improve the quality of sport on offer at the site. These include new sports centres, tennis courts, athletics tracks and Astroturf pitches, as well as changing rooms and floodlights.
- 1.21 The DCMS commended these improvements, highlighting that the development of playing pitches does not always have a negative impact. Sport England continues to safeguard pitches as well as helping to enhance sporting facilities by only giving approval for alterations where there are increased benefits for sporting facilities.
- 1.22 An understanding of pitch and other sporting provision within Bromsgrove is therefore important in achieving both local and national priorities. With the exception of REFF and Active Places, there are no other reliable data sources concerning the numbers of pitches in England. In addition, there is no nationally established system for monitoring change.
- 1.23 The exact number of pitches being lost to development or neglect is unknown and remains a contentious issue. The DCMS has established a Playing Fields Monitoring Group, tasked with publishing some definitive data.

Local features and demographics

1.24 Bromsgrove District is situated in north west Worcestershire, located to the south west of the West Midlands conurbation. The District is boarded by Birmingham, Redditch, Solihull and Wyre Forest and due to its location, in close proximity to the motorways and Birmingham, is a popular settlement for commuters.

1.25 The District covers an area of 83 square miles and although Bromsgrove is located in close proximity to Birmingham the majority of the District is rural, with 90% of land designated as Green Belt.



1.26 The main settlement within the District is Bromsgrove, where approximately 32% of the population reside. The other large settlements within the District are Wythall, Hagley, Rubery and Catshill.

1.27 The remaining residents are dispersed across smaller rural settlements such as Clent and Holy Cross, Romley and Alvechurch. Access to open space, sport and recreation facilities is limited in some of these areas; however the majority of residents have access to nearby countryside.

1.28 The large amount of Green Belt land and countryside in the District is integral to the character of Bromsgrove and large areas of accessible countryside, such as Lickey Hills, Arrow Valley Country Park and Waseley Hills provide many recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

1.29 Based on the Annual Monitoring Report 2007 the population of Bromsgrove is 91,500 (2007). Population projections show this is expected to increase to 98,056 by 2026, an increase of approximately 7%.



1.30 In 2006 24.5% of the population were aged 60 and over and the average age of residents in the District was 40.7 years (2005). These figures are both above the national average and highlight an ageing population in Bromsgrove. This will have many implications for the future provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities.

1.31 Changes to the population profile over the Local Development Framework period will exacerbate the skewed population profile. The ageing population and the consequential reduction in the proportion of young people is likely to generate further changes in the type of open space, sport and recreation facilities required to meet the needs of local residents.

1.32 97.2% of the population in Bromsgrove are classified as white Caucasian, which is significantly above the national average (90.9%). This highlights little diversity in the District; however, despite the low proportion of residents of BME origin, it is essential to ensure that the open space, sport and recreation provision caters for the varying needs of all of the community.

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- 1.33 Bromsgrove has the lowest levels of deprivation compared to all other Districts within Worcestershire and based on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2004 the District is ranked 293rd out of 354 Local Authorities nationally. Despite low levels of deprivation pockets of deprivation do exist in Bromsgrove, with the most deprived area being the northern part of Sidemoor.
- 1.34 The above characteristics will all be important determinants of the demand for open space, sport and recreation facilities across the district.

Structure of the report

- 1.35 This report is split into 14 sections. Section 2 summarises the methodology used to undertake the study and Section 3 provides the strategic context to the study.
- 1.36 Sections 4 -13 relate to each of the typologies identified within the scope of the report. Each typology chapter sets out the strategic context to that particular typology, the recommended quantity, quality and accessibility standards, the application of these standards and the resulting priorities.
- 1.37 An overview of negotiating developer contributions in light of the locally derived provision standards is contained within Section 14. This section includes examples of good practice in other local authorities as well as making recommendations for the future delivery of open space, sport and recreation facilities across Staffordshire Moorlands.
- 1.38 There are also a number of appendices that support the report, providing further background detail and statistical calculations.