

9. Recreation, Sport and Leisure



Newmarket Heath

Introduction

- 9.1 Demand for recreation, sport and leisure activities both in and away from the home is growing as a consequence of changes in working patterns and increasing prosperity. The Structure Plan considers the development and environmental implications of such activities undertaken away from the home. Facilities for recreation, sport and leisure are used by visitors as well as residents and can therefore be a valuable asset for tourism, in line with the Structure Plan approach to the economy.
- 9.2 PPG17 "Sport and Recreation" sees the role of the Structure Plan as providing a framework for ensuring that adequate provision is made for organised sport and informal recreation. PPG17 identifies the following tasks for Structure Plans:
- (a) to identify the scope for major sport and recreation initiatives;
 - (b) to provide guidance on sport and recreation provision affecting all or significant parts of the county;
 - (c) to offer guidance on other issues needing countywide policies such as the protection of sensitive areas from inappropriate sport and recreation.
- 9.3 Regional Planning Guidance for East Anglia notes deficiencies in provision for sport and recreation throughout the region by comparison with other parts of England. Therefore it states that priorities for the provision of community, sport and recreation facilities should be identified in order to make the most effective use of available funding. It also proposes that provision should be made for meeting the region's needs for sport and recreation in locations which minimise the need for travel and are not detrimental to the environment.
- 9.4 In line with this guidance, Structure Plan objectives 31 and 32 seek to maintain and enhance recreation facilities and promote and enable the provision of social and community facilities to meet local needs. Recreation and leisure facilities are used by visitors as well as residents and can thus contribute to the success of tourism, in line with the approach adopted in the economy policies.

Existing Provision

- 9.5 It is important to retain existing facilities for recreation, sport and leisure which, if lost, cannot always be replaced, especially in urban areas. Specific advice on playing fields is given in

PPG17, which emphasises that loss of such facilities should be avoided unless it is clear that compensating provision of equal community benefit will be made within the area in question or that there is a satisfactory level of facilities elsewhere in the vicinity. PPG17 commends guidance on standards of provision issued by the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) in making the assessment. The Sports Council, the Central Council for Physical Recreation and the NPFA have produced a detailed methodology for assessing playing pitch needs in larger settlements which should also be taken into account (Playing Pitch Strategy, April 1991). The Sports Council (East) also provides guidance on the appropriate provision of built facilities in larger settlements. The assessment of existing provision and projected needs through Local Plans provides a basis for decisions on proposals which would involve the loss of these facilities.

- 9.6 Under the General Development (Procedure) Order, the Sports Council is also a statutory consultee on applications involving the loss of playing fields.

REC1 Proposals which would involve the loss of an existing public recreational or sports facility will only be acceptable where it can be shown not to be required in relation to:

- (a) the overall needs of the community;**
- (b) adopted standards of provision; and**
- (c) the availability of facilities or proposed alternative provision elsewhere in the locality.**

New Provision in Towns and Villages

- 9.7 As the locations from which most demand is likely to arise, the development of new facilities in towns and villages is supported. PPG6 "Town Centres and Retail Developments" identifies leisure and entertainment facilities as key town centre uses, which can add to diversity and therefore the vitality and viability of centres. For uses likely to attract large numbers of people and therefore requiring good accessibility by a choice of means of transport, a sequential approach to site selection is favoured, with first preference being for town centre and then edge of centre locations. This principle is set out in policy ECON10.

REC2 In towns and villages the development of facilities for both indoor and outdoor recreation and sport will be acceptable, where there is no material conflict with residential amenity or with policies for transport or protection of the environment. A sequential approach will be adopted to the location of proposals for facilities attracting significant numbers of people, in accordance with policy ECON10.

Recreation in the Countryside

- 9.8 The Suffolk countryside and coast already provide for a wide variety of informal open air recreation. New large-scale facilities such as wildlife parks, marinas and golf courses should be located so as to have good access from towns. In less accessible, and therefore quieter, areas the emphasis should be upon facilities to assist in the quiet enjoyment of the countryside and/or to explain and interpret it. This might include picnic sites, nature trails and visitor centres. A more restrictive policy is applied in the Heritage Coast, the estuaries of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and the Dedham Vale AONB. This approach is consistent with PPG17, which notes the attractions of designated areas for recreational purposes, but emphasises that the protection of the environment, the primary purpose of designation, must take precedence in cases of conflict. In the countryside generally, the emphasis is on provision for sustainable activities.
- 9.9 Among larger scale proposals, those causing particular concern or for which there is particular pressure for development include golf; motor sports and other noisy activities; water parks and marinas.
- 9.10 Even where golf course proposals do not include major built development such as hotel accommodation or other sports facilities, earthmoulding, the creation of greens and bunkers and the modification of natural ground cover may result in an alien appearance in the landscape. PPG17 advises that special care should be taken over such proposals in designated areas such as AONBs and Heritage Coasts, and in historic landscapes. Proposals for golf courses should be considered against policy REC3(a) and (c) and the related environment policies in section 6. Golf courses also require substantial irrigation, and the implications of proposals for water supply should be taken into account in consultation with the Environment Agency. District Councils should seek and assess

detailed design information when determining outline planning applications for all large scale recreational development affecting high quality agricultural land and sensitive wildlife sites and landscape areas.

- 9.11 PPG 17 advises that where a demand for noisy sporting activities exists, local authorities should seek to identify sites which minimise conflict with other uses. Possibilities suggested include degraded land, former mineral sites or set aside farming land meeting the necessary impact criteria, and where environmental or other interests are not compromised.

- 9.12 In considering proposed developments for recreation provision in the countryside, particular regard should be given to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity as required by policy ENV20.

REC3 In the countryside

- (a) large scale recreation facilities well related to towns will be acceptable where there is no material conflict with policies for transport or protection of the environment;**
- (b) proposals for small-scale facilities for public appreciation and enjoyment of the Suffolk countryside and heritage will be encouraged where there is no material conflict with policies for transport or protection of the environment;**
- (c) recreation proposals under clauses (a) and (b) will only be acceptable where the effects of structures, noise, light emission or other characteristics are compatible with the character of the countryside;**
- (d) in the Broads, Heritage Coast, the estuaries of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths AONB and Dedham Vale AONB, small-scale recreation facilities will be acceptable where there is no material conflict with policies for transport or protection of the environment. Such proposals will be encouraged where they replace facilities in unsatisfactory locations or significantly lessen existing conflicts.**

- 9.13 Worked out mineral sites offer significant potential for recreation and initiatives are being pursued, particularly through the Gipping Valley project. Proposals should be considered against policy REC3 and the ENV policies in section 6.

Waterborne Recreation

- 9.14 There is a long term increase in demand for waterborne recreation facilities in Suffolk. Most sensitive in strategic terms are proposals for marinas and yacht harbours because potential sites are likely to be on stretches of estuary or coastline within designated areas of landscape and/or ecological importance, where conservation constraints are onerous. Consequently, the majority of any further provision should be made in or adjoining towns, by extension or redevelopment of existing facilities or the creation of new ones. Particular opportunities are identified at Ipswich (the Wet Dock) and Lowestoft (Lake Lothing/Oulton Broad). In both cases proposals should have regard to the operational requirements of existing port users, and in the latter case the implications for the volume of motorised traffic on the Broads would need to be taken into account.
- 9.15 Although new provision should generally be focused in or adjoining towns, individual proposals elsewhere will be considered on their merits against the transport and environment policies of the Plan. Such examinations are likely to be particularly rigorous, given the importance of such areas referred to above.

REC4 Development of new marinas and yacht harbours and associated facilities will be acceptable within towns, particularly on existing derelict, redundant or under-used water frontages, where there is no material conflict with residential amenity or with policies for transport or protection of the environment. Proposals for such development in other locations will also be considered in the light of those policies.

Footpaths, Bridleways and Cycle Routes

- 9.16 In many parts of the county, footpaths, bridleways and cycle routes are the principal recreational facilities. The County Council promotes these through the Countryside Strategy, Countryside Management Plans, Access Projects and Public Rights of Way Milestone Statements. The County Council will keep its Countryside Strategy up to date in co-operation with other agencies. Full regard will be given to the need to protect areas which are sensitive in wildlife terms, and to attract visitors away from such areas. In developing such facilities, priority will be given to those accessible by a wide range of the population. The development of the National Cycle Network will also be considered in promoting cycle routes. Policy T3 in the transport section provides guidance on this issue.
- 9.17 In making local plan allocations or considering development proposals, local planning authorities should ensure the protection or the suitable diversion of existing rights of way.