

Introduction and background

The study

Why public open space?

- 1.1 Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (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.
- 1.2 Open space and recreation provision in the District of Rother has an important role to play in supporting the implementation of these objectives.

Picture 1.1 Camber beach



Function and benefits of open space

- 1.3 Open spaces can provide a number of functions within the urban fabric of towns and villages. For example the provision for play and informal recreation, a landscaping buffer within and between the built environment and/or a habitat for the promotion of biodiversity.
- 1.4 Each type of open space has various benefits, depending on its type. For example allotments for the growing of own produce, play areas for children's play and playing pitches for formal sports events. Open space can additionally perform a secondary function, for example outdoor sports facilities have an amenity value in addition to facilitating sport and recreation.

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- 1.5 There is a requisite need to provide a balance between different types of open space in order to meet local needs. Not all residents' needs in particular areas will show a demand for open space in the form of playing pitches or allotments. Some areas will have specific local demand for 'green corridor' sites such as nature walks or bridleways.
- 1.6 Changing social and economic circumstances, changing 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 including sport and leisure. Open spaces can also promote community cohesion, encourage community development and stimulate partnerships between the public and private sector.
- 1.7 Parks and open spaces are more accessible to a wider range of people than some 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 is key to a sustainable and thriving community.
- 1.8 It is widely recognised that the provision of high quality 'public realm' facilities such as parks and open spaces can assist in the promotion of an area as an attractive place to live and can result in a number of wider benefits. These are highlighted in Appendix B.
- 1.9 Rother District Council (the Council) appointed PMP to undertake a local open space, sport and recreation study across the District of Rother. The study includes an audit of all open space provision providing a clear vision, priorities for future open space, recreation and sport provision and a direction for the allocation of future resources.
- 1.10 The prime objectives of the study are to:
- support the implementation of the Local Plan
 - provide a clear framework for the development of policies, acquisition and allocation of resources and an action plan to protect and improve open spaces, sport and recreation spaces and facilities
 - provide clear recommendations for the setting of local quantitative and qualitative standards for open space, sport and recreation facilities
 - inform the preparation of the Local Development Framework
 - inform the development of the Council's play strategy
 - inform the production of a green space strategy
 - inform the future development of a sports strategy.

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1.11 This study will contribute directly to the fulfilment of the Council's aims of:

- putting customers first
- delivering value for money
- building stronger, safer communities
- working in partnership.

1.12 The study is undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the latest Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation, July 2002) and its Companion Guide (September 2002).

The District of Rother

1.13 Rother District is situated on the south coast in the county of East Sussex. It is bordered by the District of Wealden, the Borough of Hastings, the District of Shepway, the Borough of Ashford and the Borough of Tunbridge Wells to the north in Kent. The District covers an area of 50,943 hectares. The main town is Bexhill-on-Sea, supported by the smaller towns of Battle and Rye.

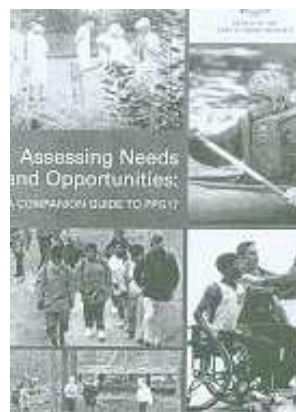
1.14 The population of Rother District is 85,428 (2001 census). The District is predominantly rural hence the low population density of 1.68 persons per hectare (ppha) compared to the South East average of 4.20 ppha and England average of 3.77 ppha.

National Policy Context: Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17): Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation & Assessing Needs and Opportunities - PPG17 Companion Guide

1.15 PPG17 states that local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities (paragraph 1).

1.16 The document also states that local authorities should undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use made of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs and opportunities for new open space and facilities (paragraph 2).

1.17 Paragraph 5 states that “The Government expects all local authorities to carry out assessments of needs and audits of open space and recreational facilities” and that “local authorities should use the information gained from their assessments of needs and opportunities to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas” (paragraph 7).



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1.18 Significant changes in this planning policy document from the previous 1991 version are:

- the definition of open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value i.e. including private land where appropriate
- a greater emphasis is placed on qualitative considerations – this is particularly important as it will allow local authorities to identify potential for increased use through better design, management and/or maintenance of open space
- it advocates the setting of local standards appropriate to the local area rather than assessment by national standards although these can be used as benchmarks – the Government believes that national standards are inappropriate, as they do not take into account the demographics of an area, the specific needs of residents and the extent of built development
- it provides further guidance on the constituent elements of open space typologies
- it clearly acknowledges the multiple functions that open spaces can perform.

1.19 The policy guidance sets out priorities for local authorities in terms of:

- assessing needs and opportunities – undertaking audits of open space, sport and recreational facilities
- setting local standards
- maintaining an adequate supply of open space
- planning for new open space.

1.20 The companion guide sets out the process for undertaking local assessments of needs and audits of provision. It also:

- indicates how councils can establish the needs of local communities and apply provision standards
- promotes a consistent approach across varying types of open space.

1.21 PMP and the Council have followed the recommendations of PPG17 throughout the study. In following these recommendations, this study has the potential to make a significant difference to the quantity, quality and accessibility of open spaces in the District of Rother.

Need for local assessments

1.22 This assessment of open space and local needs will enable the Council to:

- plan positively, creatively and effectively in identifying priority areas for improvement and to target appropriate types of open space
- ensure an adequate provision of high quality, accessible open space to meet the needs of the local community

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- ensure any accessible funding is invested in the right places where there is the most need
 - conduct Section 106 negotiations with developers from a position of knowledge with evidence to support such negotiations.
- 1.23 Where no assessment exists, developers can undertake their own independent assessment to demonstrate that open space is surplus to requirements. It is therefore desirable for the Council to have robust data to protect open space within the District.

Structure of the report

- 1.24 The report is split into 16 sections. Section 2 sets out the methodology for undertaking the study. Section 3 sets out the strategic context to provide the background and context to the study. Section 4 provides a brief summary of the consultation undertaken, while some of the key themes are drawn out within each typology section.
- 1.25 Sections 5-14 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 and the applications of these standards through the geographical areas and value assessments. These are not applicable to all typologies.
- 1.26 Section 15 provides a summary of potential resources to help to implement the findings of the study. Section 16 sets out the planning context to the study, highlighting how the application of the PPG17 study can assist with planning applications and the provision of open space in new housing developments.
- 1.27 There are also a number of appendices that support the report and are referenced throughout.