

## **Strategic context**

### **Introduction**

- 3.1 It is important to consider the findings of the local needs assessment and audit within the local, regional and national context. All documents reviewed within this report have been provided by Rother District Council and are considered important within the context of this study.
- 3.2 The Rother District Council Local Plan, Local Development Framework and The East Sussex Children and Young People's Plan were key in driving and informing this study. Additional information was extracted from the Sport England, Rother District Council and East Sussex County Council websites.
- 3.3 The following sets out the national, regional and local strategic context for Rother District Council. Further national guidance is contained within appendix A.

### **National context**

- 3.4 At the national level, Planning Policy Statement one states that:

*'Planning should facilitate and promote sustainable and inclusive patterns of urban and rural development by protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside and existing communities.'*

### **National Planning Policies (2002)**

- 3.5 Local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sport and recreational facilities. These assessments should cover the distinctive needs of the population for open space and built sports and recreational facilities.
- 3.6 When planning on developing new areas of open space, sports and recreational facilities, local authorities should:
- promote accessibility from walking, cycling and transport links
  - locate sites that will contribute to town centre viability and vitality
  - avoid loss of amenity to residents
  - improve the quality of the public realm through good design
  - look to produce areas of open spaces in industrial or commercial areas
  - improve the quality of existing facilities
  - consider the safety of the people using them, ie children
  - meet the regeneration needs of areas, therefore keeping Greenfield sites untouched
  - consider the scope for using any surplus land for open space, sport or recreational use, weighing this against alternative uses
  - assess the impact of new facilities on social inclusion

- consider the recreational needs of visitors and tourists.

**Spatial Planning for Sport and Active Recreation (2005)**

3.7 Sport England's aims are for a larger proportion of the population to become involved in sport and provide more places to play sport. Sport England seeks to:

- develop and improve the knowledge and practice of sport and physical recreation in England
- encourage and develop higher standards of performance and the achievement of excellence
- foster, support and undertake the development of facilities
- advise, assist and cooperate with other government departments and local authorities.

3.8 Sport England will provide advice on what type of sports facilities are needed for communities in the future. They will also advise on how to protect and improve the current stock of facilities, in particular protecting playing fields.

3.9 Sport England takes the definition of spatial planning as set out in Planning Policy Statements 1 (PPS1) as its starting point. This states that:

*'Spatial planning goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they function.'*

3.10 Sport England sees the planning of the spatial system as an opportunity to deliver its own aspirations for sport and recreation, whilst contributing to the goals of partners in public, private and voluntary sectors. With this there is the opportunity to deliver a planned approach towards the provision of facilities helping to reach sustainable development goals. These are:

- taking a broader view of the role of spatial planning as an enabling function which goes beyond the setting and delivery of land-use policy
- identify opportunities for delivering an enhanced quality of life for communities, in the short, medium and longer term
- recognising and taking full advantage of the unique ability of sport and active recreation to contribute to a wide array of policy and community aspirations
- the development of partnership working stimulated by, and perhaps centred on, sport and active recreation as a common interest
- using sport and recreation as one of the building blocks of planning and delivery of sustainable communities.

## **Regional context**

### **The East Sussex Children and Young People's Plan (2006 – 2008)**

- 3.11 With the generation of this plan, East Sussex County Council hope to have a role to play in supporting and improving the lives of children and young people from birth to age 19. The Children Act of 2004 was generated by the results of a national consultation with children and young people. There were five target outcomes with have been used in the East Sussex region as a starting point for their Plan. These were:
- be healthy
  - stay safe
  - enjoy and achieve
  - make a positive contribution
  - economic well being.
- 3.12 The trust plan to include Children and Young People as much as possible in the development of the overall plan. This includes implementing a participation charter to show the quantity of Children and Young People in the region that are taking part in activities provided by the Council.
- 3.13 The trust wish to develop the knowledge and skills of children in the processes of decision making in relation to plans for the Children's Trust. Training will be provided with accreditation and certification to show that their accomplishments are recognised.
- 3.14 To use the knowledge and skills of practitioners, manager and elected members in the effective support of the children and young people engaged in the Children's Trust.
- 3.15 To monitor and evaluate progress being made by the consultation and participation of children and young peoples in the Children's Trust.

### **Regional Planning Guidance for the South East: RPG9 (2001)**

- 3.16 Tourism is seen as a large reason for improving facilities and access to open spaces throughout the South East of England. It is thought that spatial development of the South East can be significantly enhanced for the good of the region. A plan has been developed with this in mind, which stretches from 2006 to 2026. The aims are as follows:
- deliver a high quality and rewarding experience for all visitors
  - help to diversify and develop further the rural economy
  - underpin and promote environmental quality and local distinctiveness in town and country
  - generating community benefits to enhance quality of life for all social groups in the region.

- 3.17 Policy TSR3 states that opportunities should be sought to protect, upgrade existing and develop new, regionally significant sports facilities.
- local development documents should make adequate provision for new or expanded regionally significant sporting venues to redevelop or expand to meet future demands and requirements of the sport and of the spectator, taking into account sports governing bodies' needs strategies as they become available
  - Sport England should be proactive in advising the Regional Assembly and local authorities on the need for new or expanded regionally significant sporting venues
  - local authorities should be proactive in maximising the benefits to local communities of any major or expanded sporting facilities
  - regional partners, including Sport England, SEEDA and the Regional Assembly, should in partnership with the Greater London Authority, identify and promote opportunities for new investment in sports facilities in the region which will be needed to underpin the London Olympics in 2012.

**Community Services Council Plan (06/07)**

- 3.18 East Sussex County Council publishes an annual plan that sets out its approach to providing services to the county's residents. Aiming to be a modern, efficient and accountable authority it intends to provide quality services for low council tax and increase the county's prosperity and security.
- 3.19 The Community Services section focuses on community safety and reducing crime and the fear of crime. Tackling antisocial behaviour in partnership with other agencies is seen as a priority to improving the county. In addition the provision and promotion of other community services provided by the county such as the development of cultural activities is also highlighted.
- 3.20 The Children's Services section promotes the need for healthy lifestyles for children and young people. Improving access to services particularly in rural areas is important to ensure equality and equity. The County Council is also keen to promote excellence and make suitable provision for gifted and talented children and young people.

**A Cultural Strategy for East Sussex County Council (2003)**

- 3.21 East Sussex County Council acknowledges that partnership working is essential to the delivery of cultural targets. The aim is to make East Sussex a place where people can live fulfilled lives with secure employment and opportunities for active, healthy and enjoyable lifestyles.
- 3.22 Included in the scope of the strategy are sports facilities, parks, open spaces and countryside recreation.
- 3.23 The strategy identifies six themes:
- promotion – what is distinctive and special about East Sussex

- conservation – 67% of East Sussex is AONB and there is a need to balance recreation and cultural activities with protection of the land for future generations
- employment – the need to link cultural experiences and values with regeneration, urban renewal and economic development
- participation – promotion of sense of belonging and self worth by taking part
- life long learning – encouraging active engagement in activities which leads to new developments and cultural growth
- infrastructure – improving facilities to meet the changing needs of the population.

### **Community Safety Strategy (2005-2008)**

- 3.24 The key objective to this strategy is to help local people feel safer by delivering effective schemes to reduce crime and the fear of crime across the county. In Rother District 94% of residents feel safe in their area during the day-time but this figure drops to 65% at night-time. Town centres are considered the least safe with 50% or more saying they felt unsafe. The most frequent cause for concern in Rother District is young people causing a nuisance or loitering.
- 3.25 Whilst the coastal towns of Hastings and Eastbourne are considered crime hot spots, Bexhill is also highlighted albeit to a lesser extent. Overall crime rates in Rother District are below average for East Sussex.
- 3.26 Future priorities for Rother District to drive down crime include; finding more for young people to do, having more visible policing and providing somewhere suitable for young people to meet. Working with youth groups, providing youth work resources to crime hotspots and promoting safety in the community generally all contribute to an improved sense of safety.

### **Local Transport Plan (2006-2011)**

- 3.27 The second Local Transport Plan for East Sussex sets out:
- “To make East Sussex a thriving County where every resident enjoys an enhanced quality of life with improved travel choice and access to employment opportunities and local facilities; safer and healthier communities and a cleaner environment that is valued, protected and improved, for future generations.”*
- 3.28 The strategy primarily focuses on local transport solutions but also has to meet the needs of longer distance travellers. It sets out to improve access to services by providing greater travel choices and ensuring account is taken of the impact of transport developments on land use. Reducing congestion, managing the changing demands of transport users whilst trying to reduce the need to travel by private car and protecting and enhancing the environment are all wrapped up in its key objectives.
- 3.29 In addition local accessibility assessments are being compiled which take account of transport issues and location, design and delivery of services that people wish to access. Rye was completed in March 2006 and the rest of the district is due to be finished 06/07.

- 3.30 Rural transport issues are recognised as an area that needs focus. Social exclusion can become more acute for non-car users contributing to increase isolation for individuals.
- 3.31 Walking and cycling are identified as important modes of travel which should have appropriate investment to encourage people to utilise them more. One major road development is identified, the Bexhill/Hastings link road.

### **Sussex Coast Sub-Regional Strategy (2005)**

- 3.32 The sub-regional strategy covers the coastline from Chichester to Rye. Home to nearly one million people it has structural weaknesses in its economy demonstrated by very high levels of multiple deprivation in many of the coastal towns, higher unemployment rates than the regional average, the lowest gross weekly earnings in the South East (excluding the Isle of Wight) and a low rate of growth in the number of VAT registered businesses.
- 3.33 The aim for the sub-regions is to:
- “Secure sustainable economic regeneration that will substantially reduce the social and economic disparities with the rest of the region while protecting and enhancing its environment and the quality of life of its residents.”*
- 3.34 Transport, housing and regeneration through business opportunities are key issues. The need to protect to sub-region’s environmental quality is also highlighted. Economic success and quality of life are both positively affected by safeguarding cultural and historic assets.

### **Local context**

#### **Rother Community Plan (2004 – 2009)**

- 3.35 From consulting with residents of the Rother, the Rother Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) has formed, to take forward the Rother Community Plan.
- “our vision is that Rother will be a place where everyone can live together sustainably and residents are properly informed, consulted and involved as part of an effective local partnership that recognises and addresses the needs of everyone”.*
- 3.36 The LSP have generated nine Priority Action Areas that need attention throughout the district of Rother therefore creating ambitions, which are
- to actively support the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships’ efforts to reduce crime, disorderly behaviour and fear of crime
  - to consult and engage with children, young people and their families in the development of facilities and services which meet their needs and enable all to participate in the wider community and realise their potential
  - to make life-long learning a reality for everyone in the Rother area
  - to provide year round opportunities for both local people and visitors to access and participate in a wide range of culture, sport and leisure activity
  - to ensure residents of Rother understand that they must drastically reduce the amount of waste going to landfill with the next two years

- to co-ordinate the action of local organisations to improve health and reduce health inequalities within the population of Rother
- to create an economic climate with fairly paid jobs for all which will help to improve the quality of people's lives
- to secure improvements to the strategic rail and road networks and to improve access to better public transport.

**Rother District Local Plan (adopted 2006)**

- 3.37 The Local Plan was adopted in 2006 and is a district-wide local plan, which covers the period to 2011.
- 3.38 The purpose of the Local Plan is to:
- set out the vision and strategy for land use and development in Rother District
  - provide a sensitive application of the planning policies to significantly contribute to the quality of life of people living and working in Rother District
  - accommodate the development needs and aspirations of local people in the most sustainable way
  - translate the provisions determined by the East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011 into site specific proposals and where necessary detailed policies for different type of development.
- 3.39 There are a number of relevant chapters within the plan. Chapter 4, Development Strategy and Chapter 5, General Development Considerations set the general policies behind land development. Chapter 7, Community Facilities, places at its heart the provision of a range of facilities that contribute to the wellbeing of communities. Further chapters focussing on specific towns and villages include policies directly relating to open space and recreational provision.
- 3.40 Policy DS1 sets out the principles for determining whether developments are appropriate in a particular location. These include:
- ensuring a good level of accessibility to a range of services and jobs by public transport, recognising that opportunities are more limited in rural areas (DS1(iv))
  - avoiding prejudicing the character and qualities of the environment including the High Weald Area and undeveloped coastline (DS1(vi)).
- 3.41 The Local Plan clearly identifies development boundaries of towns and villages (DS3) and in line with protecting the countryside any new developments that fall outside of these boundaries will need to demonstrate that a countryside location is necessary for the developments (DS4).
- 3.42 Policy GD1 sets out criteria that all developments should meet including the needs of future users of appropriate amenities and also access to these amenities by disabled users. The character and appearance of the locality also needs to be protected along with the amenities of the area.

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- 3.43 Chapter 7 identifies a wide range of community facilities that are fundamental to the vitality of the community. Proposals for new and improved community facilities will be considered and also permitted outside the development boundaries providing they fulfil a number of criteria (CF1).
- 3.44 The Inspector of the Local Plan identified a recreational site at Broad Oak which the Local Plan has not allocated due to access issues and parking implications for local residents. The site sits outside current development boundaries but policy CF1 allows for improved community facilities outside of these boundaries subject to certain criteria being met.
- 3.45 Developments which include loss of recreational space, play space, amenity areas or allotments will not be permitted unless it can be shown that the open space and/or facilities are surplus to the community's needs, it cannot be used for any other community purpose or alternative provision elsewhere significantly improves the level and quality of the facilities (CF2).
- 3.46 Currently the National Playing Fields Association standards are used as the benchmark for sports and recreation provision. In addition policy CF3 identifies the opportunity for planning obligations, where residential developments of five dwellings or more are planned, being used to secure funding towards new or improved recreational facilities. With regard to provision of play area space for every 50 residential dwellings, developers will be required to provide at least 0.1 hectares. This may be required for less than 50 dwellings where a shortfall has been identified (CF4).
- 3.47 Play space for children is highlighted for healthy and social development and includes both equipped and non-equipped play areas. In addition long term care of new or improved open space or play space needs to be identified.
- 3.48 Rother District is a popular area for equestrian activities and this is considered as a separate issue as part of the Local Plan. Once again a planning obligation may be enforced to secure improvements to bridleways that may have increased use as a result of a particular development. (CF5).
- 3.49 Proposals for northeast Bexhill include provision of land to be incorporated into the Pebsham Countryside Park, some of which will remain undeveloped and some possibly available for recreational use. Additional land has also been identified for a small car park to serve the Countryside Park. The Countryside Park aims to establish a key recreational and amenity resource for Bexhill, Hastings and their wider catchment (BX2/BX4). Policy BX3 also identifies proposals for structural open space on land north of Sidley.
- 3.50 Bexhill cemetery will reach capacity in certain respects within the next few years and an area to the west of the current site has been allocated for cemetery purposes (BX10).
- 3.51 Battle is situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the Local Plan allocates land at Blackfriars for housing, education and open space purposes (BT2).
- 3.52 Rye is a small historic town at the eastern end of Rother District. Rye Harbour is tidal and policy RY2 seeks to ensure that proposals for development and change in this area maintain and enhance its amenities as a boating centre. In addition land between South Undercliff and Rock Channel has been allocated for housing, marina,

open space and commercial use. In the event that the allotments need relocating a suitable alternative will need to be found (RY3).

- 3.53 Burwash has an identified shortfall in open play space and Policy VL1 allocates land for housing and recreational purposes. This land is adjacent to the existing recreation ground and the policy provides means to link the two spaces.
- 3.54 New village halls and open space provision are identified for Flimwell and Etchingam and the Local Plan allocates land for both these facilities (VL2A/VL3/VL4). In addition developer contributions towards a children's play area at Grove Farm, Robertsbridge are listed (VL6).

**Rother District Council Corporate Plan and Strategies (2006)**

- 3.55 The Local Plan shows a cross section of areas that the Council will target within their Corporate Plan, these are:
- to lead and engage the community
  - to provide a safe and healthy District
  - to provide opportunities to meet the social, leisure and cultural needs of the community
  - to provide for economic growth and employment
  - to protect and enhance the built and natural environment.
- 3.56 Aim two of the Community Strategy is to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure and services to support thriving communities and facilitate new development. The other four aims regarding community safety as an aspect of local amenities.
- 3.57 Policy GD2 describes that local authorities have the obligation to provide the necessary number of recreation spaces for a given number of dwellings. A threshold of five dwellings has been set, that is thought to be sufficient to warrant a recreational space.
- 3.58 Qualitative and quantitative assessments of the current provisions will be conducted as soon as is practical. Prior to this assessment recognition has already gone to parishes that had previously been identified as being in need of further local provisions.
- 3.59 PPG17 protects existing open spaces, sports and recreational buildings and land from being built on. Policy CF2 is consistent with this as development which would result in the loss of recreational facilities, playing fields, open spaces, amenity open space or allotments is not permitted unless:
- the land is surplus to requirements
  - the facility or area is not needed for an alternative form of community facility provision
  - alternative provisions are made elsewhere in the locality, which is of similar size and attractiveness that would be a general improvement from the original space.

- 3.60 Playing space is seen to be a priority for children as is vital to their health and social development. The recreational space for children should be located in a safe area, sufficiently away from housing, so that no nuisance to surrounding properties will be experienced.
- 3.61 There is a need for proposals for new or enhanced facilities for sport, recreation and amenity purposes will be collected by a district wide assessment. This will control contributions to new or improved local recreation or play facilities.

**Rother District Council Local Development Framework (2006)**

- 3.62 The Rother District Local Plan identifies the following overall aims:
- to ensure that the environment is conserved and enhanced and that new development contributes to local character, cultural identity and amenities
  - to ensure that there is adequate infrastructure and services to support thriving communities and facilitate new development
  - to meet housing needs in the most sustainable manner, with particular regard to affordability and quality of housing
  - to secure a more prosperous and diverse economy
  - to promote a safe, efficient and sustainable transport system.

**Rother District Annual Performance Plan (2006)**

- 3.63 Rother District Council has a legal obligation to write and publish an annual performance plan. The purpose of the plan is to set out the Council's performance in an honest, balanced and accessible way.
- 3.64 The plan identifies seven key aims with executive priorities. The aim most pertinent to this review is the meeting of social, leisure and cultural needs of the community. The Council's ambition is to develop, encourage and promote a wider range of opportunities in recreational and cultural activity to contribute to healthy living, community cohesion and economic prosperity.
- 3.65 Every three years the Council undertakes a residents satisfaction survey, the last published results being in 2003. Users and non-users of facilities are questioned. Two key questions regarding satisfaction with parks and open spaces and satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities in Rother District were included. The satisfaction with the former was just above the median and the latter just below the median.
- 3.66 Methods for improving customer satisfaction are identified as part of the improvements plan 2004-2007. Targets for future surveys are also included.

**Your Culture and Leisure (2006-2011)**

- 3.67 The Local Government Act 2000 places a duty on local authorities to prepare community plans and form local strategic partnerships. The purpose of the published strategy is to:
- explore what culture and leisure opportunities exist across Rother

- understand local views on this provision
  - analyse what is done well and where improvements are required
  - develop an action plan for the future.
- 3.68 Culture and leisure covers a diverse range of activities and they contribute to a wide range of community aims. These aims include improving:
- economic activity and employment
  - neighbourhood regeneration
  - physical and mental well-being
  - crime and community safety
  - lifelong learning
  - environmental benefits
  - community capacity building
  - community pride and self confidence
  - social inclusion.
- 3.69 Whilst the importance of cultural and leisure activities is accepted it tends not to lead development and through this strategy the Local Strategic Partnership is encouraged to give culture and leisure a higher priority. The strategy promotes partnership working to achieve its goals of improving current and introducing new opportunities for activities in the local community.

#### **Parish Action Plans**

- 3.70 The Local Strategic Partnership has funded a support programme to assist communities in rural Rother and two wards in Bexhill (Sidley and Pebsham) to develop and implement local Action Plans. Six parishes have published their plans to date: Brede (2003), Netherfield (2004), Ticehurst, Flimwell and Stonegate (2003), Sedlescombe (2002), Westfield (2006) and Peasmarsh (2006).
- 3.71 Recurring themes through these Local Action Plans reflect the rural nature of Rother District. These include:
- access to local facilities suitable for indoor sports and recreational activities. Netherfield, Peasmarsh and Flimwell identified the need for new village halls or community centres and Ticehurst planned to refurbish their facility
  - improvements to countryside access, better signing and maintenance of footpaths, additional bridle paths/cycle routes
  - developing children's and young people's play facilities and opportunities through new play equipment (Westfield, Sedlescombe) or youth worker support (Sedlescombe/Netherfield/Brede/Westfield).

**Summary and conclusions**

- 3.72 The provision of open spaces supports wider governmental objectives from national to local authorities. These general objectives are social and community cohesion, urban renaissance and promoting a healthy and enjoyable life. Any development of open spaces (ie the development of new or developing existing spaces) should take into account bio-diversity and nature conservation opportunities and develop an increasing environmental awareness.
- 3.73 Several organisations active within the District of Rother share similar aims and objectives with regard to open space and recreational provision. They are willing to work in partnership and by pooling resources it should be easier to fulfil these goals and manage and develop the open space required by the local population.
- 3.74 There is strong evidence that community involvement (especially children and young people) will be used as a consultation tool in maximising the usage of the open spaces, which will provide the community with a sense of ownership, therefore remaining dedicated in its development.
- 3.75 Specifically in Rother District Council, the main issues which have arisen through the strategic review are:
- enhancement, protection and new provision of open spaces where achievable within the District are key priorities supported through all Council documents
  - parks, open spaces and sport facilities can play a role in achieving priority themes of the community plan and priorities within the corporate plan
  - children and young people is a key theme of both the corporate plan and community strategy and action plan. These objectives and opportunities for younger people in the District should be maximised and dovetailed with recommendations of this report
  - parks and open spaces cut across many wide-ranging issues and can impact on health levels, increasing the well-being of residents, workers and visitors
  - open space and recreational provision influence an area's ability to provide economic growth and also regeneration
  - transport issues have bearing on residents across the whole district, rural areas can be isolated for non car users and there is a need to link appropriate transportation methods with the recreational needs of residents and visitors
  - the value of open spaces and parks is recognised by the Council and is highlighted throughout Council documents, policies and objectives for the District. These will be built upon for future planning needs and protection of open spaces, complemented through the consultation and recommendations of this report for existing and future provision of open space within the District.
- 3.76 In summary, this review of strategic documents highlights the local importance of maintaining and improving open spaces within Rother District Council. This local needs study and resulting strategy will contribute to achieving the wider aims of a number of local and national agencies.