

Introduction

Community facilities, open space, sport and recreation underpin our quality of life. They are key factors in promoting social inclusion and community cohesion, improving health and well being and securing an urban renaissance.

Everyone benefits from community facilities such as schools, colleges, hospitals, health centres, places of worship and social centres. The Council will ensure that land is reserved for new facilities where it can and will support the replacement or improvement of existing facilities. The aim is to provide accessible facilities that will reduce reliance on the car and encourage people to walk, cycle or use public transport. The creation of local accessible facilities can also help to foster local identity, bring a community together and reduce social exclusion.

Likewise, open space and sport and recreation facilities are important factors in determining quality of life, whether it is participation in sport, informal play or exercise, or a passive appreciation of open space for amenity reasons. As such, a wide variety of provision is required including sports halls and pitches, playgrounds, landscaped open space and off-road routes for walking, cycling and horse riding.

To ensure effective planning for open space, sport and recreation it is important that the needs of the Borough's population are known. The first UDP adopted the National Playing Field Association's standards for open space provision. However, national standards cannot cater for local circumstances and detailed local standards are now required. Standards for football and rugby pitches have been drawn up and are included in this Chapter. For open space and other sports and recreation provision, a detailed assessment of need and opportunities has to be undertaken.

Opportunities for access to the countryside between the urban areas are a valuable resource for recreation. Policies are continued for a network of Greenways and the recreational use of waterway corridors. A new policy sets out a vision for the further co-ordination and improvement of recreational provision throughout much of the countryside, to be designated a Regional Park.

The Plan reflects the requirements of The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 which extends the public's ability to enjoy the countryside whilst also providing safeguards for landowners. The Act introduces a new statutory right of access and modernises the existing rights of way system.

There is one further significant new proposal, for the Leigh Sports Village, incorporating a new football and rugby league stadium together with other sport, education and leisure facilities.

C1 COMMUNITY FACILITIES, OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION

THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO ENSURE THAT REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMUNITY FACILITIES, OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION ARE MET BY:-

- (1) SAFEGUARDING COMMUNITY FACILITIES THAT MEET AN IDENTIFIED NEED AND SECURING IMPROVED FACILITIES WHEN REQUIRED;**
- (2) SAFEGUARDING EXISTING OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION PROVISION THAT MEETS, OR HAS THE POTENTIAL TO MEET, AN IDENTIFIED NEED; AND**
- (3) SECURING NEW AND IMPROVED OPEN SPACE, SPORT AND RECREATION PROVISION THAT WILL MEET AN IDENTIFIED NEED.**

As noted above, community facilities, open space, sport and recreation underpin our quality of life, contributing to social inclusion and community cohesion, health and well being and an urban renaissance. The Council aims to achieve a level and quality of provision that meets the needs of the Borough's population. This will be achieved through:

- an assessment of the differing and distinctive needs of the population;
- safeguarding existing provision unless it can be shown that there is no need; and
- securing new and improved provision in order to meet identified needs.

C1A Community Facilities

The development of community facilities will be permitted provided that:-

- (a) they will be fully inclusive and accessible for the community they are intended to serve by means of public transport, walking and cycling, with first preference being for town centres and local centres;**
- (b) they will be compatible with surrounding land uses; and**
- (c) adequate provision will be made for access by other means of transport without detriment to road safety.**

Community facilities include community centres and halls, places of worship, schools and colleges, libraries, children's day nurseries, day centres, hospitals, clinics, health centres, surgeries, dentists and other health practitioners. Indoor leisure and entertainment uses over 500 square metres floorspace are covered by Policy **S1F**.

Such uses should be inclusive and accessible in terms of their design (see Policy **A1C**) and location. If they are serving a predominantly local catchment, they should be easily accessible on foot from surrounding residential areas. Access for cyclists and by public transport should also be considered, particularly when it would serve a wider catchment. In order to achieve this, first preference will be for existing centres as identified in Policy **S1**.

C1B Open Space, Sport and Recreation Provision

Local standards for the provision of football and rugby pitches are:-

Pitch size	Football	Rugby
Mini	1 per 14,000 population	1 per 15,000 population
Junior	1 per 5,500 population	1 per 14,000 population
Senior	1 per 4,500 population	1 per 9,000 population

The Council will undertake a local assessment of needs and opportunities for other open space, sport and recreation requirements.

In seeking to meet shortfalls against the standards or otherwise improve the provision of sport and recreation facilities, the development or provision of new or enhanced facilities will be permitted provided that:-

- (a) they will be accessible for the community or communities that they are intended to serve by means of walking, cycling and, where appropriate, public transport;**
- (b) there will be no undue impact upon the amenity of surrounding land uses; and**
- (c) there will be no adverse impact on road safety.**

In order to plan effectively for open space, sport and recreation, it is essential that the needs of local communities are known. Detailed local assessments are required in order to understand exactly what needs there are.

In this way, local standards for the provision of grass pitches for football and rugby have been developed, as shown in the Policy. The Council is committed to undertaking detailed local assessments for open space and built sports and recreational facilities in addition to football and rugby.

The assessment will include built sports and recreation facilities and all open space of public value, including:-

- outdoor sports facilities including tennis courts, bowling greens, sports pitches, golf courses, athletics tracks and playing fields;
- public parks and gardens;
- children's playspace;
- provision for teenagers including skateboard parks, outdoor basketball hoops and other informal areas;
- amenity greenspace;
- natural and semi-natural urban greenspaces;
- allotments and community gardens;
- cemeteries and churchyards;
- accessible river and canal banks;
- accessible countryside in the urban fringe; and
- civic spaces.

In order to ensure that opportunities to use (and enjoy) open space or sports and recreation are available to all, it is important that shortfalls in the provision of facilities are met and modern equivalent facilities provided. This will include new facilities that can be used more intensively, such as floodlit 'all weather' multi-use games areas and synthetic pitches. These need to be located sensitively in order to avoid undue impacts on neighbouring land uses, such as noise, light spillage, traffic and parking. The policy seeks to secure an acceptable balance between these issues.

C1C Protection of Open Space and Sport and Recreation Provision

Development on open space, or on land or of buildings in use, or most recently in use, for sport or recreation, will not be permitted unless:-

- (a) it is ancillary to the principal use of the site and will not adversely affect the quantity or quality of provision; or**
- (b) it will be replaced in a suitable location by alternative provision of equivalent or better quantity and quality; or**
- (c) it is for an indoor or outdoor sports facility, the provision of which would be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of existing open space or playing fields, or part thereof, and it could not reasonably be located elsewhere; or**
- (d) a carefully quantified and documented assessment of current and future needs has demonstrated, to the satisfaction of the Council, that there is an excess of open space or playing field provision in the catchment and the site has no special significance as open space or for sport or recreation; or**
- (e) it is clearance land that has been temporarily landscaped for amenity purposes pending redevelopment.**

The Council will seek to enter into a legal agreement with the developer in order to secure provision or other necessary works in accordance with this policy.

This policy applies to all forms of sport and recreation facilities and open space of public value as set out in the list under Policy **C1B**. In order to ensure that opportunities to use (or enjoy) open space or sports and recreation facilities are available to all, the loss of such facilities will be resisted except in the limited circumstances described in the policy.

Ancillary development will be small scale and related to the recreational use of the site, for example, changing rooms, storage space for maintenance equipment or interpretation facilities.

When replacement provision is to be made available, it should be at least as accessible to current and potential new users, and at least equivalent in terms of size, usefulness, attractiveness and quality. Wherever possible the aim will be to achieve qualitative improvements. Planning obligations and/or conditions will be used to secure the exchange land, ensure any necessary works are undertaken and that the new facilities are capable of being maintained adequately through management and maintenance agreements.

In exceptional circumstances it may be advantageous to site a new sports facility on an existing playing field or area of open space, provided that the new facility be of sufficient benefit to the development of sport that it will outweigh the loss of the existing provision. In such circumstances it would need to be demonstrated that it could not be reasonably located on a suitable site elsewhere, including considerations of accessibility.

In order to satisfy the Council that the land is no longer needed for recreational use, a local assessment of needs must be undertaken. In doing so, it will be necessary to consider all of the potential recreational functions that the land could perform, not just its current or most recent use. In the absence of a robust and up-to-date assessment by the Council, the applicant will be required to produce written evidence based upon a comprehensive and carefully documented assessment of supply and demand in the catchment, using a methodology acceptable to the Council. Developers will be required to consult the local community and Sport England and demonstrate that their proposals are widely supported.

Such an assessment is not required for cleared areas that have been landscaped on a temporary basis in order to remove an eyesore in advance of redevelopment. Such locations are commonplace in many parts of Wigan Borough where there has been a need for clearance in the past but no initial demand or funding for redevelopment.

The Council will seek to enter a legal agreement to secure improved provision when appropriate.

*** C1D Leigh Sports Village, Pennington, Leigh**

Land at Atherleigh Way/Marshall Street in Pennington, Leigh is allocated for a comprehensive sports-led mixed use development to include:-

- (a) a stadium of a standard suitable for the Football League and Super League Rugby;**
- (b) a competition standard athletics track with associated field athletics and spectator facilities;**
- (c) pitches of a standard suitable for senior amateur rugby football league, together with a club house;**
- (d) outdoor pitches and other sports and recreation facilities for community use;**
- (e) a sports hall;**
- (f) replacement accommodation for Wigan and Leigh College;**
- (g) a replacement primary school; and**
- (h) other outdoor sports facilities (within Use Class D2) as appropriate.**

In association with the above, the following uses:

- (i) related commercial uses including leisure, food and drink and retail;**
- (ii) a hotel;**
- (iii) residential accommodation; and**
- (iv) small scale Class B1 business units;**

will also be permitted provided that it can be demonstrated that they will not, individually or cumulatively, harm the vitality and viability of Leigh town centre or other centres, and are necessary to support the complete and comprehensive development of the Sports Village.

*(23, 28)

Leigh has two professional/semi professional sports clubs, Leigh Centurions Rugby Football League Club and Leigh RMI Association Football Club. Both clubs occupy Leigh Centurions' traditional but outdated ground at Hilton Park.

Similarly, Leigh Harriers Athletics Club has outdated facilities at Holden Road. In addition, Leigh East Amateur Rugby Football League Club occupies land to the immediate south of Hilton Park and would benefit from improved new facilities.

There is, therefore, considerable potential and demand for a substantial new sports development in Leigh, providing modern equivalent facilities for all of these clubs, and a site has been identified at Pennington.

The site is currently part occupied by sports pitches and premises used by Wigan and Leigh College, both of which will be replaced with modern equivalent and additional facilities as part of the development. However, much of the remainder including the former BARLA (British Amateur Rugby League Association) site and land owned by British Waterways is largely unused.

The sports village concept envisages:-

- a 10,000 capacity (estimated) all-seater stadium;
- an athletics track and related facilities, including spectator facilities;
- various grass pitches;
- replacement college buildings;
- a sports hall;
- a jogging track;
- a skate park;
- tennis courts; and
- a replacement primary school.

These uses form the cornerstone of the development but rely also upon a wider mix of complementary and related activities in order to provide a commercial basis for the development. Additional uses that will be permitted, but only as part of a sports-led mixed use development as far as they are necessary to support that development, include:-

- commercial leisure and related retail uses such as sports retail, health and fitness, indoor leisure and food and drink uses;
- a hotel;
- crèche facilities;
- residential development including possible student accommodation; and
- small scale business units.

The Sports Village should be designed and built in a way that is sensitive to sustainable development principles, including the efficient use of energy and water, the reduction and reuse of primary minerals and measures to promote safety and security.

A Travel Plan will be required to ensure that the site is widely accessible by means other than the car, both at peak times including match days and at other times including evenings and weekends (see Policy **A1B**). Good access on foot and for cyclists should be provided between the site and neighbouring residential areas, and convenient access by bus from Leigh town centre and surrounding areas should be facilitated.

The sports village will be linked to the provision of associated additional playing fields adjacent to the Howe Bridge Sports Centre and will be contingent upon the redevelopment of the site presently occupied by Leigh East ARLFC (Policy **S1H**). All of these developments will be linked by legal agreements governing the development of each.

The proposal for the Sports Village is consistent with the conclusions of the Mersey Belt Study commissioned by the Northwest Development Agency, that major investment in leisure, tourism and sports is needed to 're-image' south-central Wigan.

Pennington Flash Country Park is on the opposite side of Atherleigh Way and there are existing links with it at the Westleigh Brook Bridge on Atherleigh Way. Linkages for pedestrians/joggers, cyclists and horse riders should be enhanced as part of the Sports Village development.

The northern boundary of the allocation abuts the Leeds and Liverpool Canal (Leigh Branch) and development should enhance the canal corridor and secure appropriate linkages with the towpath.

Westleigh Brook abuts the southern boundary of the site and due attention will need to be given to this brook as a wildlife corridor and its value as habitat for water voles, which will need to be surveyed. An amphibian survey will also be needed because great crested newts have been recorded in the general area.

Landscaping should be used creatively to integrate the development with its surroundings, providing screening where appropriate and using native species to promote biodiversity.

The provision for a school is for replacement premises for Christ Church Pennington Church of England Primary School at West Bridgewater Street, which has substandard buildings.

*** C1E Greenway Network**

The Council will continue to develop the Greenway Network for walkers and, wherever practicable, disabled people, cyclists and horse riders. The Network will be protected from development which would negate its purpose.

Extensions to the Greenway Network will be identified when opportunities arise.

*(4, 6-8, 10, 11, 14-19, 21-25, 27)

The Greenway Network includes public rights of way, canal towpaths and disused railways and is one of the Borough's key recreational assets for residents and visitors alike. Much of it involves the reclamation of derelict land.

The aim is to develop a network of attractive, safe, off-road routes linking the countryside and recreational facilities with urban areas across the Borough. Greenways will link into proposals of neighbouring authorities including long distance footpath and cycle routes, such as the National Cycle Network, and complement the Council's Walking and Cycling Strategies and initiatives to improve the bridleway network.

Agreements will be sought to secure advantageous links across private land or other improvements, including as part of new development through negotiation, planning conditions and/or legal agreement.

*** C1F The River Douglas, Canal Network and Other Water Features**

Proposals to enhance the use of the River Douglas, the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, the Bridgewater Canal and other significant water features for leisure and recreational purposes, will be permitted provided that there will be no detrimental impact on:-

- (a) the safety and amenity of existing users and of nearby uses;**
- (b) the value of the location as a habitat for wildlife;**
- (c) the industrial or architectural heritage of the location; and**
- (d) priorities for management of the water environment, including pollution and flooding.**

*(4, 6-8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 22-25)

The Borough's waterways are a valuable and attractive resource and provide a range of recreational activities, from formal pursuits such as sailing and fishing to informal activities such as walking and cycling along banksides. The Council, in conjunction with relevant agencies, will encourage water-based recreational activities on the canals, rivers, lakes, reservoirs and flashes through measures such as increasing facilities for boats, improving the towpath surface, and removing eyesores. However, this will only be done where it is compatible with wildlife and other environmental interests.

C1G Regional Park

Within the Borough a regional park will be developed, aimed at the enhancement/improvement of:-

- (a) recreational opportunities, including Greenways and other rights of way, open space networks, sporting facilities, water based recreation, public art and small venues for the performing arts;**
- (b) wildlife habitats, biodiversity, landscapes and urban fringe environments, including ongoing derelict and contaminated land reclamation and renewal and extensive woodland planting;**
- (c) conservation and interpretation of the built, industrial and natural heritage;**
- (d) accessibility from urban areas, in particular on foot, by cycle and by public transport, with comprehensive accessibility for disabled people.**

The concept of regional parks is promoted in the Regional Economic Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance. They will help to meet the demand for recreation in the countryside nearer to urban areas. Leisure journeys will be shorter and pressure on more sensitive locations, such as the national parks, will be reduced. It will also improve the quality of life in urban areas by tackling degradation in the urban fringe and developing opportunities for recreation.

It is intended that the proposed regional park will incorporate existing recreation, leisure and industrial heritage attractions together with open countryside, woodlands and wetlands that have recognised importance for nature conservation and recreation. Within the Borough, existing features that could be incorporated include Astley Colliery, Pennington Flash Country Park, the Wigan Flashes, Wigan Pier, the Wigan Flight of 17 canal locks, Haigh Country Park, Worthington Reservoirs and the Douglas Valley. In total, it contains a wide variety of existing and proposed visitor attractions, each of which is currently under-exploited, and it is estimated that in excess of a quarter of a million people live within a 10 minutes cycle ride of the area.

However, other than the areas and features listed above, large parts of the landscape remain degraded as a legacy of mining and manufacturing. Tree cover is much reduced and there are derelict areas and structures.

There is, therefore, the need and the opportunity. The environment is in need of improvement, visitor attractions would be enhanced and there is significant additional potential for the area as a day visitor destination.

The Red Rose Community Forest has already made some progress in increasing tree cover and opening up new areas for informal recreation, much of this with the involvement of local people. The involvement of local people would also be sought in the implementation of the Regional Park proposals. The Greenway Network (Policy **C1E**) also ties in with the Regional Park proposals, as do the Council's countryside management activities. Leigh Sports Village (Policy **C1D**) would also be complementary by virtue of its location, adjacent to Pennington Flash Country Park and the variety of recreational uses proposed.

The Regional Park would bring together many existing activities and proposals and enable greater potential to be achieved, to the benefit of local people and the wider Mersey Belt and region.

C1H Public Rights of Way

The Council will support the retention and enhancement of the Public Rights of Way network.

Development will not be approved where it results in a closure or diversion of a Public Right of Way unless a satisfactory alternative route exists or can be agreed as part of the Planning Application, subject to legal requirements being resolved.

The Public Rights of Way network provides a valuable leisure and recreational resource for walkers, horse riders and cyclists in the Borough. Providing a convenient means of travelling from one place to another, the Public Rights of Way network also provides direct links to the Borough's Greenway network for residents and visitors alike.

Public Rights of Way are subject to other statutory procedures outside of the planning application process. The granting of outline or detailed planning permission does not constitute permission to close or divert a Public Right of Way affected by development. There is a separate legal procedure for changing the status and/or alignment of Public Rights of Way.

This policy applies in regulating the impact of new development upon existing Public Rights of Way.

The Council will take account of any implications to the Public Rights of Way network when assessing each planning application. Appropriate user groups will be consulted prior to making a decision on a planning application.

Public Rights of Way on new development sites should provide direct, secure and visually attractive routes. The presumption will be that a Public Right of Way will be kept on its existing line unless there are good reasons to suggest otherwise. The developer will be required to accommodate the Public Right of Way through the creation of green corridors and open spaces where appropriate. In situations where such provision is not feasible, the Council will work with the developer to safeguard the Public Right of Way and provide a satisfactory alternative conforming to current legislation.

Opportunities will also be taken to improve and extend the existing Public Rights of Way network when new development is proposed. Such proposals will be identified within the Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan, in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.