

THE IMPORTANCE OF GREENSPACES IN STROUD

POLICY BACKGROUND

It is universally recognised that sport, recreation and green spaces, all underpin people's quality of life. The provision of such areas and facilities, in a suitable quantity and quality, will be a key part of fulfilling a wide range of the objectives highlighted by both local and central government. These include:

- **Supporting the town's regeneration** – a comprehensive provision of high quality and well managed open spaces, sports and recreational facilities will create an urban environment that is attractive, clean and safe. People enjoy having open space near to them to provide an outlook, variety in the urban scene, or as a positive element in the landscape.
- **Supporting the environment** - green spaces in urban areas perform vital functions as areas for nature conservation and biodiversity and by acting as 'green lungs' they can assist in meeting objectives to improve air quality. Sites may also have potential to be corridors or stepping stones from one habitat to another.
- **Supporting social inclusion and community cohesion** - well planned and maintained open spaces and good quality sports and recreational facilities can play a major part in improving people's sense of well being in the place they live. As a community resource, a focal point for community activities, they can bring together members of communities and provide opportunities for social interaction.
- **Supporting health and well being** - open spaces, sports and recreational facilities have a vital role in promoting healthy living and preventing illness, and in the social development of children of all ages through play, sporting activities and interaction with others.
- **Supporting a more sustainable development** - by ensuring that open space, sports and recreational facilities (particularly in urban areas) are easily accessible by walking and cycling and that more heavily used or intensive sports and recreational facilities are planned for locations well-served by public transport.

In order to achieve these objectives in Stroud, it is therefore essential that a well-designed Green Spaces Strategy is firstly draw-up with full public support and then fully implemented.

Central Government Planning Policy Guidance

Schedule 12 of the **Planning and Compensation Act 1991** requires local authorities to include within their development plans policies for 'the conservation of the natural beauty and amenity of the land' and the 'improvement of the physical environment'.

Nature conservation issues should be included in the surveys of local authority areas required by sections 11 and 30 of the **Town and Country Planning Act 1990** to ensure that the plans are based on fully adequate information about local species, habitats, geology and landform.

The new **Planning Policy Guidance Note 17: Sports and Recreation** aims to give local planning authorities a clearer framework for assessing their needs for open spaces, making good deficiencies, protecting what is valued, and ensuring that everyone has adequate access to open space. It recognises that in addition to improving quality of life, the provision of informal recreation facilities improves

urban quality, promotes health and well-being, acts as habitats for flora and fauna, acts as a community resource for events and meetings and as a visual amenity.

PPG17 makes a clear difference between formal playing space (sports facilities and playing fields) and informal greenspaces (parks, gardens, footpaths) and states that local planning authorities should seek to provide for a comprehensive and attractive network of both types of recreational facilities. In preparing plans, it states that councils should first carry out *'a robust assessment'* of current provision for all types of formal and informal recreation so that they can then identify need and set standards for informal recreation areas in their plans.

'PPG9: Nature Conservation (1994)' clearly recognises that when dealing with wildlife issues, development plans should not solely be concerned with designated sites but with all land of conservation value. This is in terms of its nature conservation and biodiversity value. But significantly, the guidance also states the need to allow people in towns and cities to have direct contact with nature and the resulting importance to the quality of life for local communities.

(Para 14) 'Many urban sites for nature conservation have an enhanced local importance as a consequence of the relative lack of wildlife sites in built-up areas.'

'PPG3 – Housing' (2000) sets out a clear aim of creating sustainable residential environments. It gives five key principals that local authorities should promote to achieve this. The third of these (Para 46) is to *"promote a greener residential environment."* The fifth states the aim for *'a greater emphasis on quality and designing places for people'*.

To achieve this, the guidance repeatedly cautions against the loss of natural greenspaces in urban areas for development. *'The Government attaches particular importance to the 'greening' of residential environments.'* And in (Para 53) *'Local planning authorities should have clear policies for the protection and creation of open space and playing fields..... Developing more housing within urban areas should not mean building on urban green spaces.'*

The PPG3 guidance follows one of the key recommendations from **Lord Rogers' Urban Task Force**. It concluded that the greening of our towns and cities was a key principal to be followed if we are to make them more attractive places to live and slow the demand by people to live in rural areas.

'Well-managed public open spaces improve the attractiveness of urban areas and help promote a healthier lifestyle. They are therefore vital to enhancing the quality of urban environments and the quality of our lives.' This is one of the key themes running through the **Urban and Rural White Papers** (2000).

The **Urban White Paper** sets out the basis of a strategy to do more than simply halt the decline. The government has appointed a minister with responsibility of finding ways of improving the quality of all urban open spaces. It makes as a priority the need to think more imaginatively about the kind of open spaces that can make a difference to the quality of people's lives in urban settings.

'Over the last few decades a lot of public open space within urban areas has been lost to encroaching development and too much of what is left has been neglected and poorly maintained.' (Urban White Paper Section 6: Para 3)

Local Planning Policy

Regional Planning Guidance for the South West RPG.10 (July, 1994) set the scene for providing for leisure in the region when it stated: *'Facilities for leisure, including sports and cultural activities, enhance the quality of life in the Region....Plans should also contain policies to protect open space in urban areas which is important for recreational or amenity reasons.'*

The draft Regional Planning Guidance (1999) set targets for accessibility and protection of wild green spaces in town and cities. Policy EN1 under the heading "Urban green space" stated that local authorities should provide wildlife greenspace within 300metres of every home.

One of the key objectives stated in the approved **Gloucestershire Structure Plan** is: *'To promote the regeneration and greening of the urban areas of the county.'* It also recognises that: *'The proximity of ...locally valued open spaces to peoples' homes enhances the residential environment and is a vital determinant of quality of life.'* (15.2.3).

The **Stroud District Local Plan** (*Deposit Draft 2000*) has sections of policies on both the natural environment and recreation. Policy R1 seeks to protect outdoor play space with a list of sites within the parish of Stroud that are protected. Policy R4 seeks to protect what it terms as 'amenity open space'. It states development will not be allowed on 'amenity spaces' where it would 'remove opportunities for recreation in areas identified as being deficient in other forms of outdoor recreation'. However no work has been done before this audit to show which areas have a deficit. Neither does the policy R4 include 'casual play space' in its list of protected sites. This omission was subject to an objection by the Town Council on which the inspector who held the Public Enquiry is due to report later this year.

Elsewhere polices seek to protected certain greenspaces and nature sites. But these concentrate solely on statutory designations such as SSSIs and Key Wildlife Sites. The Local Plan again fails to list the smaller urban greenspaces and afford them full protection. This was also the subject of an objection by the Town Council at the Local Plan public enquiry.

Policy R5 seeks new outdoor play space or contributions towards it from new development. Policies relating to new buildings also have criteria allowing for the effect on open space and natural features to be taken into account when considering applications for development.

Key Local And National Research

In 1998 Stroud Town Council commissioned an Urban Capacity Study as the basis for its representations in relation to the Stroud District Local Plan. A key part of the **'Stroud Environmental Capacity Study'** was the distribution of a questionnaire to every household in the parish in an attempt to gauge what people thought were Stroud's 'special qualities'. Of the 6,500 questionnaires distributed, 1,095 were completed. The overwhelming outcome of the questionnaire was the importance that respondents accorded to the natural environment in Stroud - both in terms of views of the surrounding area and proximity of open space and countryside. 98% of respondents agreed strongly with the statement: 'It is pleasant living close to greenfields and open space.'

'The Greenways Report' (1996 Stroud Valleys Project) (*Appendix 2*) - was prepared for Stroud Town Council and gave an inventory of open spaces within the parish of Stroud and adjoining parishes of Rodborough, Cainscross, Thrupp and Whiteshill. The report is extremely detailed, has a full inventory of each site and makes various recommendations for improved management. In its conclusion, the report accepts that accessible green spaces in urban areas are essential for quality of human life and wildlife. Its recommendations included that:

- The network must receive the appropriate recognition and protection through the planning system and the new Local Plan
- The Local Plan should accept and adhere to English Nature's recommendation that an urban resident should live a minimum of 280m from natural greenspace.
- Key open spaces should be assessed for further protection by designating them as either Local Nature Reserves or Pocket Parks. (Pocket Parks is a concept first developed by Northamptonshire County Council, where small greenspaces are owned and managed by local people to provide leisure and visual amenity and nature conservation).

An **Opinion Survey** was sent to every home in the parish by Stroud Town Council in May 2000. It sought to find out which of the services that it provided were most valued by local residents. The provision of green spaces came out as the fifth most valued service of around 30 given.

As part of its response to the Stroud District Local Plan (Deposit Draft) Stroud Town Council produced a **Consultation Document** (1998) to gauge local opinion on a range of options for housing in the parish. This document was made freely available, received widespread coverage in the local media and was the subject to two public meetings. More than 150 consultation documents were taken away and around 35 written responses received, in addition to many verbal responses and more than 150 people attending the public meetings. The consultation document fully set out the town council's aim of designating sites within the parish as protected natural greenspaces. It included a list of suggested sites. No objections were received to any aspect of these proposals.

'Accessible Natural Greenspace in Towns and Cities' (English Nature Report 153 - 1995) (*Appendix 4*) places great importance on natural greenspace in urban areas. The report conducted a comprehensive review of appropriate size and distance criteria as a minimum that people should have access to natural greenspaces in urban areas. It sets a straight-line distance of "natural greenspaces that can easily be accessed on foot by able bodied adults and children" as 280 metres. The same level of access to natural greenspaces is stated in **"A Biodiversity Guide for the Planning and Development Sectors in the South West"** (March 2000)



HOW MUCH PLAY AND GREEN SPACE SHOULD STROUD HAVE?

The National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) defines playing space as “space that is safely accessible and available to the general public and of a suitable size and nature for sport active recreation and children’s play.” It states that outdoor playing space is not the same as public open space. It is a significant component but not the only form of open space.

This Strategy will attempt to look at all areas of open space within the urban boundary of Stroud. However in order to tackle the different uses and purposes of these open spaces we have separated them into two different categories.

The first is outdoor play space – an area where people of all ages can actively play and explore. The second is urban greenspace – where the primary use is for the natural environment (biodiversity) and for people to have easy contact with nature. In many cases, sites will serve both purposes and have been included as such.

The end result, is a document that for the first time reveals exactly what Stroud has in terms of open space for both people and wildlife.

In terms of play space, this Green Spaces Strategy has a simple aim. The aim is to find out how much playing space Stroud should have; how much it has at present and if there is a shortfall – how can it be closed?

In terms of greenspace, the aim is very similar. The aim is to find out how much accessible urban greenspace Stroud has and what can be done to provide new greenspace in areas where people have no reasonable access.

With both of these areas, there is another very clear aim - to ensure that the play areas and greenspaces that exist at the present time are not lost - and wherever possible they are enhanced.

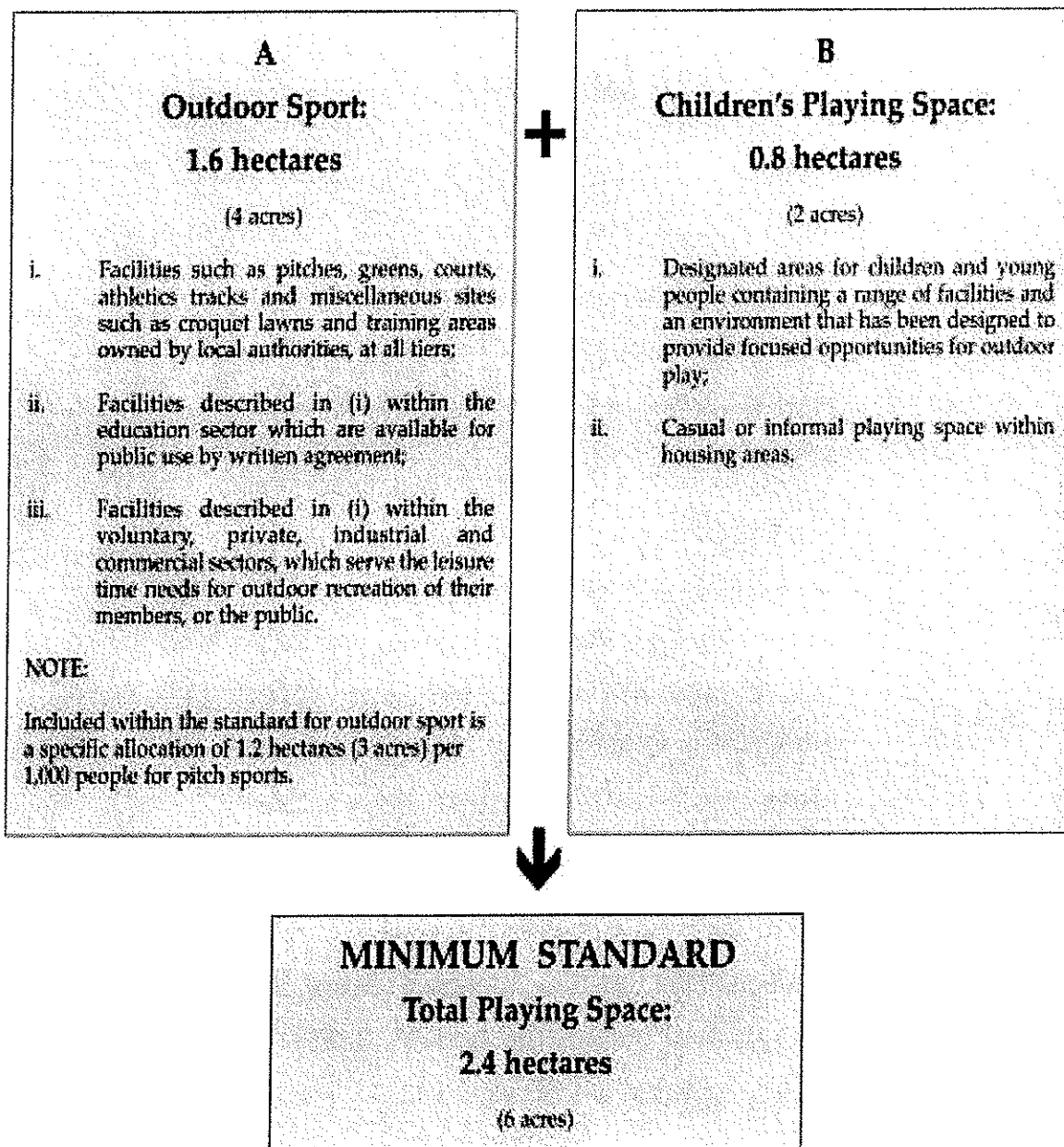
Outdoor Play Space

As its basis for play provision, the Stroud District Local Plan takes the standards set out in the National Playing Fields Association (NPFA) Six Acre Standard. This recommends a minimum standard for outdoor playing space of 2.4 hectares (six acres) per 1,000 people. As the table below indicates, for Stroud this equates to a minimum total provision of 31.2 hectares.

| | Total | 0-17 years | 18years and over |
|--------------------------|--------|------------|------------------|
| Stroud population | 13,035 | 3023 | 10,035 |

Source: www.stroud.gov.uk 2001 census data

As the diagram below shows, the NPFA then splits this total provision into three separate areas.



Outdoor Sport

The standard set per 1,000 residents for outdoor sport is 1.6 hectares (4 acres) for pitch sports and (1 acre) for non-pitch sports.

It defines pitches as 'facilities such as soccer, rugby, hockey, lacrosse, cricket and sites such as training areas owned by local authorities or owned privately and made available to members or to the public. Facilities in the education sector should only be included if they are available for public use by written agreement (dual use). It defines non-pitch sports as athletics, tennis, bowls and croquet.

Specifically excluded from the calculations, are areas of land such as verges, woodlands, commons, nature conservation areas, allotments and private gardens. Public parks are also not included - only clearly defined play areas within them.

In addition, sports halls and indoor leisure centres are excluded - being seen as complimentary to outdoor play space and not a substitute.

In the case of Stroud this translates to the following minimum provision based on a 13,000 pop'.

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| Pitch Sports | 15.6 hectares |
| Non-pitch sports | 5.2 hectares |

The NPFA stresses that its standard must be seen as a starting point for determining local provision and is a **minimum** that should be exceeded wherever possible. Research has shown that where local standards have been adopted, they are normally higher than the NPFA standard.

The Government (PPG17) believes that open space standards are best set locally, in order to take account of local circumstances. Local authorities have been instructed to carry out comprehensive assessments of needs and opportunities in order to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas.

Local standards should include:

1. Quantity - how much provision is actually needed.
2. Quality - against which to measure the need for enhancement of existing facilities.
3. Accessibility - including distance thresholds and consideration of the cost of using a facility.

At the present time, no such assessment of need has been carried out for the Stroud parish. Until an assessment of demand, carried out according to the NPFA and PPG17 guidance, has been completed this strategy will base its findings and recommendations on the NPFA six acre standard - but with one additional criteria.

The **accessibility** of outdoor sports facilities, in terms of distance from the home, is clearly a major factor in determining whether people are able to make use of them. Clearly if all the sports pitches are in one half of the parish then those residents in the other half are not getting a suitable provision. This is especially relevant in an area such as Stroud, where the steep hills and poor highway and public transport network create accessibility obstacles for many groups of residents.

The NPFA guidance again sets a standard for accessibility, suggesting that a travelling time of approximately 20 minutes by motor transport to synthetic pitches or athletics tracks or a 10-15 minute cycle or walk to other outdoor facilities is reasonable.

This strategy will set a standard: that local playing fields should be available within 1.2kms (0.75 miles) of every dwelling.

Children's Play Space

Children's play space is described in the Six Acre Standard as: 'Designated areas for children and young people containing a range of facilities in a safe environment designed for outdoor play.'

It has long been recognised that outdoor playing space for children is essential for their healthy development. Consequently, they comprise the group greatest in need of opportunities and well-designed environments for play.

Children's needs for playing space are significant in their own right and merit a different approach from the needs of older people. Standards should be based on providing a range of facilities within a neighbourhood to meet the varying needs of different age groups.

Children's play areas can be formal places with installed equipment or casual space within residential areas – the sort of place where youngsters can go out and play for five minutes before tea. They can include areas such as Pocket Parks - small areas of open space with planting where local residents can spend time out of doors in attractive surroundings. However 'casual space' must be in safe location and capable of providing opportunities for informal play. They should not be incidental spaces or verges and parking areas.

The NPFA guidance seeks 0.8 hectares of children's play space per 1,000 population. In the case of Stroud this translates to the following minimum provision based on a 13,000 population.

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------|
| Children's playing space | 10.4 hectares |
|--------------------------|---------------|

The key criteria for judging adequacy of provision is not purely the amount of play space in the parish but its accessibility - the time it takes a child to reach it. As long ago as 1970 it was established that children will not travel more than 400 metres to play. The most relevant measure for access is not distance but walking time. To achieve this we have broken down the need for play provision into three separate areas for each age group. Each area will have its own standard for provision, based on distance from a person's home.

LAP (Local area for play) is for children of up to six years of age and should be sited within a walking time of 1 minute (60 metres) from home. It should be a minimum of 100 metres sq in a safe location and with a space or features that allow for casual play and/or features that enable children to identify the space as their own domain (e.g. a footprint trail, model insect, mushroom style seat).

LEAP (Local equipped area for play) is an area designed and equipped for children of early school age (4-8 years). It should be within a walking time of five minutes (240 metres) from home. It should have an activity zone of 400 m² and contain at least five types of play equipment.

A LAP and a LEAP provide separate functions and should not be combined, although they could be sited immediately adjacent to one another.

NEAP (Neighbourhood area for play) is an area designed and equipped mainly for older children but with opportunities for play by younger children as well. It should be located within 15 minutes (600 metres) from home for children of 8 years and above. It can be split into two areas: one providing a range of play equipment; the second a hard surface area for ball games or wheeled activities. It should contain at least eight types of play equipment. Ideally LEAPS and NEAPS should be provided in the same location to provide opportunities for family involvement.

| | Time from front door | Distance | Straight line distance |
|-------------|----------------------|--------------|------------------------|
| LAP | 1 minute | 100 metres | 60 metres |
| LEAP | 5 minutes | 400 metres | 240 metres |
| NEAP | 15 minutes | 1,000 metres | 600 metres |

Accessible Urban Greenspace

Open space is defined in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as 'land laid out as a public garden, or used for the purposes of public recreation, or land which is a disused burial ground.' However, in PPG17 the government widens the scope by insisting that open space should be taken to mean all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water such as rivers, canals and which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can also act as a visual amenity.

PPG17 makes it quite clear that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should not be built on unless an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space or the buildings and land to be surplus to requirements.

Open space that is of high quality, or of particular value to a local community, should be recognised and given protection by local authorities through appropriate policies in plans. Areas of particular quality may include:

1. small areas of open space in urban areas that provide an important local amenity and offer recreational and play opportunities;
2. areas of open space that provide a community resource and can be used for informal or formal events such as religious and cultural festivals, agricultural shows and travelling fairs.
3. areas of open space that particularly benefit wildlife and biodiversity.

In planning for new open spaces and in assessing planning applications for development, councils have been instructed to seek opportunities to improve the local open space network, to create public open space from vacant land, and to incorporate open space within new development on previously-used land. They should also consider whether use can be made of land which is otherwise unsuitable for development, or procure public use of privately owned areas of land or sports facilities.

It is clear from this that the government recognises the importance of accessible urban green spaces. There is a need to both protect and enhance the existing resources and to provide new areas where there is a deficit. Again the government believes that standards for access to urban greenspaces should be set locally. In a review of appropriate size and distance criteria for access **English Nature (report 153 1995)** concluded that a distance of 280 metres was a valid minimum distance between a person's front door and a greenspace. **South West Regional Planning Guidance** (A Biodiversity Guide for the Planning and Development Sectors in the South West) took the same standard.

Taking into account the steep gradients and poor pedestrian access in many parts of the parish and the fact that such areas are particularly important for younger and older people, we recommend a local standard for Stroud should be that 'all homes are within 200 metres of an urban greenspace'.

POLICY CONCLUSION - THE STROUD LIVING SPACE STANDARDS

That Stroud should have a provision of outdoor play space on the following level

- Total outdoor playspace - 31.2 hectares
- Facilities for pitch sports - 15.6 hectares
- Facilities for non pitch sports - 5.2 hectares
- Children's Play Areas - 10.4 hectares

In addition to the above levels of provision

- Everyone in stroud should live within 1.2km of a playing field or sports pitch
- Everyone in stroud should live within 60 metres of a Local Area for Play
- Everyone in stroud should live within 240 metres of a Local Equipped Area for Play
- Everyone in stroud should live within 600 metres of a Neighb'hood Equipped Area for Play
- Everyone in stroud should live within 200 metres of an accessible green space

THE STUDY

In 2003 Stroud Town Council commissioned the Stroud Community Land Trust to compile a Green Spaces Strategy with the aim that for the first time every sports pitch, children's play area and greenspace within the parish would be recorded.

The Trust was required to map and record details of every site it could locate and use the information gathered as the basis for a set of recommendations as to how the parish could ensure that national and local standards were being met.

Over the Autumn of 2003 two researchers carried out a comprehensive audit of the whole parish using both existing records, maps, photographs as well as walking along every road and path within the urban area as identified in the Stroud District Local Plan (Deposit Draft 2000).

Detailed records and photographs were taken of every site discovered including location, access and boundaries, human use, biodiversity, known ownership and status, provision of litter and dog waste bins and any other relevant observations. Where necessary further research was carried out from appropriate records to obtain relevant history of the site.

The sites were then allocated into two categories. The first being those that met the criteria for outdoor play space. The second being those that met the criteria for accessible urban greenspace. The full details of every site located can be found in Appendixes A and B. Obviously several sites fall into both categories and are listed in each as required.

Based on those contained within the Six Acre Standard, measurements have been calculated for all outdoor play spaces in order to judge how the parish's provision matches the expected provision in the Six Acre Standard. At this stage of the audit only approximate areas have been calculated for informal play space and children's play areas. Therefore they can only be treated as approximate figures at this stage. If the strategy is to hold up to full scrutiny, we recommend that a more detailed calculations of 'casual play space' should be made using more professional mapping resources.

Furthermore, a large-scale map of the parish has been acquired and all sites placed on a series of maps in order to judge how the provision of both outdoor play space and accessible greenspace meets the agreed standards. These are included as Appendixes C-F.

THE FINDINGS

Outdoor Playspace - provision

The audit has found that Stroud has the following sports pitches and children's play areas:

- Four adult football pitches #
- Three cricket pitches #
- Three junior football pitches
- One rugby pitch
- Six tennis courts
- One bowling green
- One all weather sports pitch - football
- 22 casual children's play spaces
- 9 Local Areas for Play (LAPs)
- 2 Local Equipped Areas for Play (LEAPs)
- 1 Neighbourhood Areas for Play

Two of the cricket pitches and three of the football pitches share the same site and so can only be counted once in the Six Acre Standard. We have taken the measurement for two cricket pitches that being the larger area.

In terms of pitch sports, the current provision is **9.31** hectares compared to a Six Acre Standard requirement of **15.6** hectares.

In terms of non-pitch sports the provision is **0.5** hectares compared to a Six Acre Standard requirement of **5.2** hectares.

In terms of accessibility to sports pitches Appendix shows that

In terms of children's playspace the provision is approximately **5.65** hectares compared to a Six Acre Standard requirement of **10.4** hectares.

In terms of accessibility, Appendix shows that there are several areas within the parish that have absolutely no access to a LAP, LEAP or NEAP.

Greenspaces – Provision

The audit has identified 78 accessible urban greenspaces. In terms of accessibility, the audit has included not only sites that residents can physically visit but sites which have visual access - that people can get within a reasonable distance of, in order to enjoy the nature or open space on a visual basis.

We have included all sites that are of a significant enough size to either have or have the potential to have a notable benefit as a greenspace - either in terms of community access, visual amenity or wildlife habitat. Most public footpaths and grass verges have been excluded as incidental spaces where an individual's contact can only be momentary. However open spaces with no existing natural or community benefit have been included where, if improved, they could help meet a shortfall in a particular area.

All greenspaces identified in the audit have been mapped on Appendix with circles showing the areas that fall within the accessibility standard of 100 metres. Again this map clearly highlights which residential areas within the parish have a shortfall of provision.

It must be noted that none of the above standards can fully capture the more complicated issues surrounding individual sites through factors such as accessibility, development threats, potential for improvements and the existing quality. The audit attempts to tackle these issues by a series of recommendations of possible action contained in the detailed assessments of each site to be found in Appendix A and B. A summary of the suggested action points and priorities are contained in the 'Recommendations' section that follows.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further Research

In carrying out a robust assessment of the existing provision, based on the government's guidance contained in PPG17, this audit has fully satisfied the first stage of the research needed to draw up local standards for a Green Spaces Strategy.

To quote from the guidance: 'Local authorities should also undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use made of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs (such as charges) and opportunities for new open space and facilities. Audits should consider both the quantitative and the qualitative elements of open space, sports and recreational facilities.' This has now been completed.

However in order to have a Green Spaces Strategy that will stand up to full public scrutiny – local authorities must also fulfil the second part of the process. To quote again from PPG17: 'Local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities.'

The PPG includes detailed guidance as to how this should be done and the techniques to be used. It is a specific piece of research that needs to be carried out to a specific brief over a period of several months. We feel this needs to be implemented as a priority so that this Green Spaces Strategy can be completed and put out to public consultation.

Two other pieces of information are required. To ensure that accurate figures are contained in the Strategy, more detailed measurements of site sizes need to be made for the 34 children's play spaces and casual play spaces identified in the audit.

Secondly, while school playing fields have been identified as part of the audit they can not be counted towards the Six Acre Standard unless they are also regularly used by the community outside school hours. More work needs to be done to determine this level of use of school sports pitches as it may have a notable effect on the final figures.

Additionally, to ensure that all sites are clearly identified, every site in the Strategy should also have an OS map showing its complete boundaries. It may be that Stroud District Council, as a potential partner in this Strategy, can provide the necessary resources to help in these elements of the work.

Consultation

After completing the additional research outlined above we would suggest that the town council then carries out a full public consultation exercise with local residents and other interested parties before finally adopting the Strategy. This should be as comprehensive as possible, making use of such platforms as the parish newsletter, public exhibition and/or meeting and publicity through the local media and Internet.

However in the meantime it would be worth carrying out particular consultation with Stroud District Council, which is currently compiling its own Green Spaces Strategy. The results of our Strategy and Audit could have an impact on a number of departments at SDC. It would be very useful to have input from officers with specific knowledge to suggest any alterations that could be made to ensure the Strategy fits as closely as possible with their work and objectives. This is particularly important if Stroud Town Council wishes to see its Strategy used as the basis for new supplementary planning guidance to give added protection to the parish's greenspaces and play facilities.

New Policy To Protect Green Spaces

The aforementioned requirement, to carry out an assessment of need, only relates to the Outdoor Play Space elements of the strategy. The Accessible Urban Greenspaces do not need such an assessment of need because the Strategy is adopting its own local standard based on the need for reasonable access to such sites for everyone.

As a result work could begin immediately on a public consultation over the greenspaces element of the Strategy. Obviously this audit may have missed some sites and there may be some sites that people feel should not be included. There will also be additional information that comes forward in relation to some sites.

Site Specific Recommendations – Urban Greenspaces

As mentioned above, in terms of Urban Greenspaces, following public consultation, a final Strategy can be agreed in a relatively short timescale. Then work can begin on reducing any deficits in provision identified and in enhancing those sites that exist. However having fully consulted and agreed a final Strategy document, the Town Council must, as a matter of priority, seek to have all sites designated by the local planning authority as Protected Urban Greenspaces.

In Appendix A & B we have listed every Urban Greenspace with suggested issues that need to be addressed. To help plan a course of action we here try to split the sites into four priority groups.

STAGE 1. Priority sites

These are sites that the council should try to address as a priority as they are either under threat from development or they have potential to improve a shortfall in provision in a relatively short timescale. This list is on no particular order as we suggest an initial assessment is made of each before deciding which should be taken forward first.

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Wallbridge | in local authority ownership under threat from road scheme. |
| 18. Nelson Street | highly visible small site - if ownership secured can be developed quickly |
| 20. Paganhill | if ownership acquired could be developed quickly to meet severe need in area |
| 36. Swifts Hill View | if this is designated recreation land then could be developed quickly |
| 41. Lansdown Kennels | under threat from development – discussions needed with planners prior to planning application |
| 46. Old Horse and Groom | under threat from development |
| 56. Langtoft Road | local authority ownership could be developed quickly |
| 61. Roxburgh House | local authority ownership – under threat from school redevelopment |
| 64. Highfield Triangle | local authority ownership could be developed quickly |
| 79. Canal off Cheapside | under threat from development – discussions needed with planners prior to planning application |

STAGE 2: Ongoing projects

These are all sites where work is already taking place by organisations to enhance the sites as urban greenspaces but where further work has been identified to enhance these sites. In most cases ongoing financial support may be needed for maintenance. Ideally the council should undertake assessments of these sites to agree what work needs to be done & funding available.

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9. The Lawns | Community Land Trust seeking lease from GCC – significant improvements needed |
| 10. Hamwell Leaze | ongoing work by volunteers – further improvements possible |
| 14. Smartworks | run on a lease by local charity – improvements possible |
| 45. Leazes | run by local residents – improvements needed |
| 49 Burial Ground | refurbishment scheme to take place this winter £8,000 funding secured |
| 50. Leazes Play Field | enhancements to greenspace element to be considered |
| 59. Trinity Rooms | ongoing maintenance – lease being considered from church |
| 7. Gannicox | ongoing enhancement – lease from Tesco could be considered |
| 60. The Chur | minor improvements possible |

STAGE 3: Preparatory Sites

These sites at present do not have a direct threat and either ownership is unknown or the willingness of owners to allow their sites to be enhanced has never been raised. Resources in terms of person power and land registry searches need to be initially allocated in order to carry out some further investigations as to whether work on these is possible.

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 2. Cainscross Road | ownership and TPO |
| 3. Cainscross Road | ownership |
| 8. Old Woodland | Speak to owners to test co-operation, TPO |
| 11. Old Convent | Speak to owners to test co-operation |
| 29. College | Speak to owners to test co-operation |
| 31. Delmont's Grove | ownership |
| 34. Capel Court | ownership |
| 35. The Budding | ownership |
| 39. Springfield Rd | ownership |
| 42. Abercairn | Speak to owners to test co-operation |
| 43. Belle Vue Triangle | ownership |
| 44. Gainey's Well | ownership |
| 51. off Summer Street | ownership |
| 58. Mt Pleasant | Speak to owners to test co-operation |
| 71. Jct Thrupp Lane | ownership |
| 69. Bowbridge Lock | Speak to owners to test co-operation |

STAGE 4: Long term or no issues

The following sites either have no immediate priority or apart from ongoing maintenance have no improvements identified at present.

13. Merrywalks, 15 Bank Gardens, 16. St Lawrence, 17. Stroud Police Station, 19. Cornhill, 27. Stratford Park, 28. Stratford Park Playing Field, 30. Park Gardens, 48. Leazes, 57. Mason Road, 63. Stone Manor, 65. Highfield Road, 66. Daisybank, 67. Cemetery, 68. Cemetery, 74. Arundel Mill Close, 75. Eagle Mill Close, 12. Rosary School, 32. Square, 33. Circle, 37. Swifts Hill, 62. Stroud Mat Hospital

OTHER PROPOSALS

Urban Riverside Park

This would be a flagship project to promote enjoyment and preservation of the natural heritage of Stroud. In many towns and cities in the UK, local council's have developed projects where areas of green and open space are linked together and protected to provide attractive corridors where people can spend time and where the biodiversity is enhanced.

This Strategy has identified a large strip of land that stretches right across the parish where such a project could be developed. No less than 11 different sites can be found between Stanton's Bridge on the boundary with Thrupp and The Lawns on the boundary with Cainscross. While the sites vary in size, existing use and potential, all currently provide an undeveloped green corridor with huge potential.

The development of such a project would meet a raft of local and central government objectives and would play a key role in developing the town's tourism potential as part of the canal restoration scheme. The Urban Riverside Park would be a valuable resource as an accessible open space and play area for local residents and the project should seek to be designated as a Local Nature Reserve.

The following sites should be considered as part of any such scheme: *75. Arundel Mill Pond, 79. Bowbridge Wharf, 83. Capel's Mill, 78. Stanton's Bridge, 85. Fromebanks, 84. Canal, 5. Fromehall, 6. Fromehall Mill, 4. Strachan's Close, 86. Canal Cheapside, 1. Wallbridge*

Farmhill and Summer Crescent

These two areas of Stroud both have a significant shortfall of play facilities yet a number of readily available sites that could be improved to bring provision up to standard in a short timescale. There is a similar recommendation under the Outdoor Play Space section, however as part of these projects the greenspace quality of the sites must also be carefully considered.

Slad Brook

While carrying out the audit, a large number of open spaces were discovered along the Slad Brook between the edge of the parish on the eastern side and the industrial estate at Libby Drive. To the north of the river most sites were part of large private gardens and to the south the land is used as pasture. However this area has limited 'official' public access and is an area of significant potential habitat value. Consideration should be given to a specific study of this area to further evaluate land ownership and the potential to preserve and improve biodiversity and access.

Footpaths, verges and informal greenspaces

While going around the town to carry out the audit, the researchers identified a large number of small spaces that whilst not large enough to come under the definition of a greenspace or casual play area, have a significant impact on their immediate communities.

Many of these took the form of small amenity sites, often created as part of modern housing developments that have not been properly maintained. Often minor investment would significantly enhance the appearance of the area.

Additionally, several of the town's footpath routes have significant potential as wildlife corridors and small scale habitats. The council should revisit the work carried by the original Greenways Report and consider whether any of the recommendations should now be implemented.

Furthermore, many of the footpath routes are not currently classified as public rights of way although they have clearly been in use as such for many years. We would recommend that a full audit of these routes is carried out in order to identify those that should be classified as rights of way and duly safeguarded and maintained.

Site Specific Recommendations – Outdoor Play Space

As stated above, a full assessment of need has to be carried out before the final Outdoor Play Space Strategy can be finalised. This has a particular effect on any decisions as to whether any new sports pitches need to be provided.

However in a similar way to the Urban Greenspace Strategy, a major criteria in determining the provision of children's play space is one of accessibility – how far a site is from the family home. In these terms, the findings of the audit show that there are many areas which fall well short of the required provision. Although the figures are currently just an estimate, there is a significant overall shortage of children's play areas especially the formal one referred to as LAPs, LEAPs and NEAPs. For a town of 13,000 people to have just one NEAP is very poor.

The Town Council should develop a twin-track approach to this problem:

- ◆ Firstly by identifying existing sites that could be upgraded to serve a wider age range. There are a number of play spaces identified by the audit that have a lot of unused space that could house additional facilities.
- ◆ Secondly, by converting empty spaces into new play areas. This can be done in two ways. By identifying Urban Greenspaces that could either be converted into a casual play space or a LAP. And by identifying Casual Play Spaces that, with a few small pieces of play equipment, could be turned into a LAP.

It must be noted however that none of these proposals will avoid the need for the creation of major new sites, especially for additional NEAPS.

STAGE 1: Play Area Upgrades

LAP to a LEAP –

24 Daisy Bank – limited room in current play area for more than one additional piece however consideration should be given to items for older children elsewhere

32 Park Gardens – Consideration could be given to facilities for older children on the lower part of the current play area or elsewhere on the site

25 Arundel Mill – limited space but the grassed area could be considered for additional equipment

26 Summer Crescent & 27 Archway Gardens – Both of these areas need a broader evaluation, as alternative council-owned sites exist in close proximity which may provide better locations for expanded provision. In the case of Summer Crescent, it may be more suitable to site a larger play area on the more open field area at the other end of the estate and convert this into more of the Pocket Park/greenspace. In the case of Archway Gardens, the Strategy identifies a number of sites within the estate. A fuller evaluation is needed to see what is possible and consult with residents. However one option would be to expand the existing play site into a LEAP and create two or three LAPs elsewhere on the estate.

LAP to a LEAP or NEAP

23 Highfield Road & 33 Uplands Play Area – Both these sites have plenty of space to provide more equipment for a much wider age range.

LEAP to a NEAP

30 Mason Road – currently just under the NEAP level due to limited fixed play equipment and maybe items for toddlers. The existing fenced play area could easily be extended.

31 The Leazes – A few additional items would extend the age group attracted to this site. Provision needed for older children. Especially important as this site serves a wide catchment area.

STAGE 2: New Play Areas

Casual Play Space to a LAP or LEAP

1 Wallbridge Lock – a few items for toddlers could be added – next to canal and busy road.

2 Strachans Close – some informal use already – may be best left as a more adventure area

3 Gannicox – plenty of space, needs to be balanced against conservation issues

4 The Lawns – There are several flat areas that could be converted into a play area

5. Hamwell Leaze – limited flat space

10 The Square – would need careful consultation with residents

11 The Circle - would need careful consultation with residents

12 Capel Court – ownership unknown – not well overlooked.

13 Land off Fennels View – good potential if already designated as an amenity space

18 Trinity Rooms – a few small items for toddlers could be added

21 Bowbridge Lock – land ownership needs to be discovered but would fill an area of deficiency

Urban Greenspace to a Casual Play Area or a LAP

5 Fromehall – the only large flat area of land in the urban area that remains undeveloped. Floodplain? Potential to meet sports pitch shortfall and as park or Urban Riverside Park.

20 Paganhill Estate – If ownership can be secured ideal site to meet deficit for this area

39 Land off Springfield Rd – If this doesn't revert to garden then should be used to meet the deficit in LAP or casual play space.

41 Lansdown Dairy – a LEAP or a NEAP should be provided as part of this development.

Future Planning

It is envisaged, that as the additional research work is carried out to complete the Strategy, more detailed recommendations can be drawn up to create specific policies that will enable the eventual standards to be met. At this stage it is clear that a number of measures need to be given careful consideration by the council if the Strategy is to become more than a piece of paper that lies on the shelves gathering dust. The following are just a selection of issues that will need to be considered:

- ◆ Staffing - this is a major project that will involve a commitment by the council both in terms of development work and ongoing maintenance.
- ◆ Funding - such a strategy will require significant funding in terms of capital costs for new equipment and ongoing running costs.
- ◆ Work to secure by formal agreement the use of school playing fields by the wider community outside of school hours.
- ◆ Tougher guidelines to secure cash for new play facilities through Section106 agreements. Every new house should contribute to a fund - not just larger developments.
- ◆ Investigation of suitable sites both within and outside the urban area that could be acquired to meet the expected shortfall. Could involve the use of compulsory purchase powers.