

## **Introduction and background**

### **Introduction**

- 1.1 Bexley's **Open Space Strategy and PPG17<sup>1</sup> Audit and Assessment** (referred to as the Open Space Strategy), sets a framework for the future planning and management of open spaces, outdoor sport and recreation facilities by encouraging various service areas to effectively plan for the future delivery and implementation of improvements. The London Borough of Bexley has formally adopted both the **Open Space Strategy**, published separately, and this **Open Space Strategy Technical Paper**. The Council adopted the Strategy and this Technical Paper on 4 December 2008 and, therefore, both documents will be a material consideration when making decisions on planning applications.
- 1.2 Both the OSS and this Technical Paper include an Action Plan: at Section 12 of this document; and at Table 7.1 in the Strategy. The action plan will be implemented by various services and periodically reviewed. This document will inform further management or action plans for the various services.

### **The Open Space Strategy**

- 1.3 In November 2007, London Borough of Bexley (the Council) appointed consultants PMP to produce its Open Space Strategy (OSS), which is a strategic framework and assessment of all our open space, outdoor sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.4 This consultants' work was undertaken in accordance with the requirements of Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17): *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation* (July 2002), and its Companion Guide<sup>2</sup> (September 2002).
- 1.5 Policy 3D.12 of the Mayor's London Plan (February 2008) states that London borough councils should prepare open space strategies to understand the supply and demand of open spaces and to identify ways of protecting, creating and enhancing them and improving the quality of open spaces. The Mayor of London's Guide to the Preparation of Open Space Strategies provides detailed guidance on the processes that should be adopted to produce a strategy and this has been taken into account during the preparation of this PPG17 assessment and strategy framework.
- 1.6 The key objectives of the OSS are to:
- undertake an audit of existing open space provision, outdoor sport and recreation facilities in the Borough
  - undertake an assessment of the existing and future needs for open space and sport and recreation facilities in the Borough
  - develop a framework for the future planning and management of open space, sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.7 The OSS will form part of the evidence base for the Local Development Framework (LDF) and its portfolio of Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary

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<sup>1</sup> National Planning Policy Guidance Note 17 (PPG17), *Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation*, Department for Communities and Local Government, July 2002, available online at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/planningpolicyguidance17>

<sup>2</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government: PPG17 published July 2002; Companion Guide published September 2002.

Planning Documents (SPDs). It will inform the development of the preferred options phase of the Core Strategy DPD, which will be the key spatial plan for Bexley. The OSS will also inform the development of other emerging LDF documents which will contribute towards decision making on planning applications.

- 1.8 The key output of the Core Strategy will be a framework for the future planning and management of open spaces, sport and recreation facilities. This document is a technical document to support the overarching Open Space Strategy that outlines the priorities for the delivery of open space in Bexley.
- 1.9 The document provides a strategic framework for the London Borough of Bexley, supporting local and site-specific documents, such as the River Cray and Managing the Marshes Strategies, as well as documents of regional importance, such as the Mayor of London's East London Green Grid Framework.

### Why public open space?

- 1.10 Open space and recreation provision in the Bexley has an important role to play in supporting both the implementation of both national objectives and, more locally, in the achievement of key Council priorities.



- 1.11 The provision of open spaces, sport and recreation facilities are becoming increasingly important and the contributions they can bring to both national and local priorities are widely recognised. For example, the benefit to local communities is reflected in the *Park Life* report<sup>3</sup>, which indicates that 92% of all those questioned had visited a park within the last month.
- 1.12 PPG17 states that well designed and implemented planning policies for open space, sport and recreation facilities are fundamental to delivering broader Government objectives, which include:
- supporting an urban renaissance
  - supporting a rural renewal
  - promotion of social inclusion and community cohesion
  - health and well being
  - promoting more sustainable development.
- 1.13 The value of open space is not just recreational. The strategic contribution that open spaces can make to the wider environment includes:
- defining the local landscape character
  - providing an appropriate context and setting for built development and infrastructure
  - contributing to the historic value and understanding of some listed buildings
  - helping to achieve a softer interface between urban and rural environments

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<sup>3</sup> Park Life report, June 2007, by Green Space

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- emphasising the presence of particular natural features within the landscape such as river valleys, ridgelines etc
  - supporting habitats and local wildlife
  - mitigating climate change and flood risk
  - promoting and protecting biodiversity and habitat creation
  - promoting and improving links between open spaces.
- 1.14 The White Paper Planning for a Sustainable Future<sup>4</sup> highlights minimising climate change and the protection of the environment as some of the key challenges to be addressed through the planning system in future years. The provision of green space will be instrumental in the achievement of these objectives.
- 1.15 The rising profile of parks and open spaces, and improved access to them, is also clear at a regional level. The Mayor of London's East London Green Grid Framework - Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) to the London Plan<sup>5</sup>. This is a guide for creating a network of interlinked, high quality open spaces that will connect residential areas, town centres, public transport hubs, the River Thames and surrounding countryside.
- 1.16 The Green Grid aims to ensure that the regeneration of East London delivers sustainable communities that lead to an improved quality of life for its residents long after the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. A sub-area framework has been developed for Bexley, the River Cray and Southern Marshes. This is a key part of the East London Framework Green Grid area and will ensure that the importance attached to parks, open spaces and linkages between them continue.
- 1.17 Parks and open spaces are central to the character of Bexley and are currently a focal point of the status and identity of the Borough. The Council is committed to the provision of diverse leisure opportunities balanced with nature conservation and the health and well-being benefits offered for residents.
- 1.18 The River Thames is a valuable resource to Bexley. It contributes to achieving a number of objectives in the Borough, including regeneration and nature conservation. Maximising the full potential of the River Thames is a key aim for the Council in terms of both recreation and biodiversity.

### **Function and benefits of open space**

- 1.19 Open spaces can provide a number of important functions to support town centres, industrial and residential areas. For example, providing play and informal recreation, a landscaping buffer between the built environment and/or a habitat for the promotion of biodiversity.
- 1.20 Each type of open space has various benefits related to its functions. For example, allotments for the growing of one's own produce, play areas for children's play facilities and playing pitches for formal sports activities and events.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Communities and Local Government, "Planning for a Sustainable Future: White Paper" 21 May 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Greater London Authority, East London Green Grid Framework, Supplementary Planning Guidance (February 2008)

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- 1.21 While each open space site has a primary purpose, many open spaces perform secondary functions. For example, outdoor sports facilities have an amenity value in addition to facilitating sport and recreation. This is particularly true of the parks in Bexley, which are multifaceted by providing a wide variety of facilities as well as varying landscapes including formally maintained parkland and natural areas.
- 1.22 There is a need to provide a balance between different types of open space in order to meet local aspirations. Local aspirations may vary from place to place and change over time.
- 1.23 Changing social and economic circumstances, changed work and leisure practices, more sophisticated consumer tastes and higher public expectations have placed new demands on open spaces. They have to serve more diverse communities and may have to face competition from various developments. While the provision of open spaces can be challenging, open spaces can also promote community cohesion, encourage community development and stimulate partnerships between the public and private sector.
- 1.24 Parks and open spaces are more accessible to a wider range of people than some sport and leisure facilities and are better able to realise the aims of social inclusion and equality of opportunity. The provision of open spaces, recreation provision and access to them is important to an ideal, sustainable and thriving community. The Park Life report<sup>6</sup> highlighted that 83% of those surveyed feel that parks are the focal point of a community.
- 1.25 It is widely recognised that the provision of high quality ‘public realm’ facilities such as parks and open spaces can assist in the promotion of an area as an attractive place to live, and can result in a number of wider benefits. These are highlighted in Appendix A.
- 1.26 Of particular note is the historical benefit of open spaces. The English Heritage Register of Park and Gardens of Special Historic Interest includes five open spaces in Bexley that are listed, which can reinforce the historic value of these open spaces. Some of these listed parks may also include listed buildings (as shown in brackets below):
- **Danson Park** Grade II (listed buildings Danson Mansion Grade I and Danson Stables Grade II\*),
  - **Hall Place** Grade II\* (listed buildings Hall Place, garden walls and gates Grade I, Barn and Granary Grade II),
  - **Foots Cray Place** Grade II (various Grade II listed buildings around edge of the open space),
  - **Lamorbey Park** Grade II (listed buildings Manor House Grade II) and
  - **Lesnes Park** Grade II (Ancient Monument – Ruins of Lesnes Abbey is a listed building Grade II).
- 1.27 Parks, natural spaces and other types of open space do not exist in isolation but form part of the green infrastructure of the borough. Green infrastructure is the physical environment within and between urban areas and open spaces. It is a network of multi-functional open spaces, including formal parks, gardens, woodlands, green corridors, waterways, street trees, public spaces in town centres and open

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<sup>6</sup> Park Life report, June 2007, by Green Space

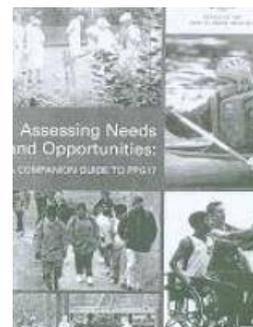
countryside. It comprises all environmental resources, and thus a green infrastructure approach also contributes towards sustainable resource management.

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

- 1.28 PPG17 states that local authorities should undertake robust assessments of the existing and future needs of their communities for open space, sports and recreational facilities (paragraph 1). It encourages local authorities to effectively plan for the future delivery of appropriate open space, sport and leisure facilities.
- 1.29 The document suggests local authorities should undertake audits of existing open space, sports and recreational facilities, the use of existing facilities, access in terms of location and costs and opportunities for new open space and facilities (paragraph 2).
- 1.30 Paragraph 7 states that “local authorities should use the information gained from their assessments of needs and opportunities to set locally derived standards for the provision of open space, sports and recreational facilities in their areas”. PPG17 sets out the Government’s belief that national standards are inappropriate, as they do not take into account the demographics of an area, the specific needs of residents and the extent of built development. PPG17 therefore places significant emphasis on meeting local needs and expectations.

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

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



- 1.32 The Companion Guide to PPG17 details a suggested process for undertaking local assessments of needs and audits of provision and outlines the key objectives of an open space, sport and recreation needs assessment.
- 1.33 This Strategy has been undertaken following the process set out in the PPG17 Companion Guide and seeks to facilitate the effective provision of open spaces across Bexley.
- 1.34 It provides justification for the local standards recommended, detailing current provision and setting out local community need. The application of the recommended local standards highlights key areas of deficiency and priorities for enhancement.

### **Local features and demographics**

- 1.35 The London Borough of Bexley is located in South East London and surrounded by the London Boroughs of Bromley, Barking and Dagenham, Havering and Greenwich and, in Kent, Dartford and Sevenoaks District Councils. For this Strategy, consideration of access to open spaces beyond the administrative boundary of Bexley have been considered, as this is essential in fully understanding cross

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boundary movement and for interpreting the need for and use of open space in the Borough and beyond. .

- 1.36 Bexley has a population of 218,307 (census 2001) that has remained relatively stable since 1991. Between the 1991 and 2001 censuses, there were marked differences in population change in different parts of the Borough. Communities in the north and north-east of the Borough saw significant increases; those in other parts of the Borough saw decreases. This uneven pattern of population growth is likely to continue over the Local Development Framework period due to the Thames Gateway and Mayor of London's London Plan opportunity areas that are located in the north of Bexley. Uneven growth will have significant implications on the provision of and demand for open space, sport and recreation facilities in the area. Furthermore, population growth places great pressures on land available for development. Despite this, development can also provide the opportunity for the provision of new or enhanced open space or improved access to them.
- 1.37 Changes in population in this period (between 1991 and 2001) also included a:
- 17% increase in the number of children aged 10 to 14
  - 28% decrease in the number of people aged 20 to 24
  - 23% increase in people aged 35 to 39
  - 24% increase in people aged 50 to 54
  - 35% increase in the number of elderly people, aged 85 and over
- 1.38 Based on London Plan growth targets, Bexley's population is forecast to rise in the future, by about 4.5% (about 10,000 people) between 2001 and 2016. Although population growth was limited leading up to 2001, changes to the overall profile of residents in the Borough occurred, with increases in the proportion of residents over the age of 85 and increases in residents between the ages of 10-14, 35-39 and 50-54. By contrast, the proportion of residents between the ages of 20-24 declined by 28%. Changes to the population profile will impact on the existing and future demand for open space, sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.39 Bexley is one of the greenest of all London Boroughs, with almost 12% of the land in the Borough considered to be green land with large areas of Metropolitan Open Land and Metropolitan Green Belt. Bexley has 46 sites of metropolitan, borough or local importance for nature conservation; two sites of special scientific interest; and two nature reserves. Bexley has a housing density of 35 people per hectare<sup>7</sup>, which is significantly above the national average of 3 people per hectare, but below the London average of 45 people per hectare. The presence of sites of importance for nature conservation is of particular significance within the urban environment. Green space is becoming an increasing focus of London Boroughs and the provision of a network of green space across the region is high on the agenda<sup>8</sup>.
- 1.40 Bexley's population is made up of many diverse groups of people and according to the 2001 census, 9% of the population is from a black or minority ethnic (BME) group, a proportion higher than the national average. The diversity of population provides challenges for the provision of open space as it is essential to ensure that

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<sup>7</sup> 1 hectare (ha) is the same as approximately 2 senior sized football pitches (each measuring 100 metres x 50 metres). Hectare per 1000 is an open space standard used to measure an area (hectares) for every 1000 people.

<sup>8</sup> Greater London Authority, East London Green Grid Framework, Supplementary Planning Guidance (February 2008)

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provision meets the needs of all sectors of the community. Well-designed and managed open space can be instrumental in the integration of communities.

- 1.41 Despite relatively high levels of employment, there remain pockets of deprivation and high unemployment within the Borough. Maximising local access to facilities in these areas will be essential to ensure that the provision of open space, sport and recreation facilities meet the needs of all residents and communities. Several regeneration initiatives are underway to revitalise areas of the Borough. Again, these schemes provide an important opportunity for the proactive planning of open space, sport and recreation facilities.
- 1.42 In comparison to many other London Boroughs, Bexley is perceived to have poor public transport infrastructure with no direct access onto London's Underground, Light Rail or Transit services even though 40% of the population live within 800 metres of a railway station. There is a relatively good network of bus services with well distributed bus stops, but some areas are still considered to have poor or infrequent bus services. Car ownership is overall higher than national averages but about a quarter of households do not have access to a car. In order to maximise the usage of open space, sport and recreation facilities it will be essential to ensure that sites are easily accessible to all.
- 1.43 Bexley benefits from being part of the East London Green Grid, a concept aimed at providing East London residents and workers with a multi-functional network of open spaces. Bexley is already one of the greenest Boroughs in London and the Borough contains many high quality open spaces including: Danson Park; Foots Cray Meadows; East Wickham Open Space; Lesnes Abbey and Hall Place gardens, which have been awarded the nationally renowned Green Flag award.
- 1.44 Danson Park has been awarded the prestigious title of London's best park during 2007 and 2008, which is unprecedented to receive this award for two consecutive years. In 2007, 47% of publicly-accessible open spaces were awarded Green Flag Status in the borough.
- 1.45 Despite being one of the greenest boroughs in London, many open spaces are fragmented by roads, housing and other developments. Additionally, many sites are in private ownership that could make them more vulnerable to potential development proposals. While many areas of the Borough are rich in open space, some areas are considered to be deficient in terms of access to open space.
- 1.46 Bexley's population is made up of many diverse groups of people and this provides challenges for the provision of open space as it is essential to ensure that provision meets the needs of all sectors of the community. Well-designed and managed open space, with good access, can benefit everyone and in areas of growth they can be instrumental in the integration of existing and new communities.

### **Structure**

- 1.47 This Technical Paper has twelve sections. **Section 2** summarises the methodology used to undertake the consultants' study and **Section 3** provides the strategic context to the study.
- 1.48 PPG 17 suggests a range of facilities should be included within an open space, sport and recreation strategy. **Sections 4-11** relate to a variety of different types of open space in Bexley ("typologies"):
  - parks and gardens (Metropolitan Parks, District Parks and Local Parks)

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- natural and semi-natural open space (including sites of importance for nature conservation)
  - amenity green spaces
  - facilities for children (aged up to 12)
  - facilities for young people (aged over 12)
  - outdoor sports facilities
  - allotments
  - cemeteries and churchyards
  - corridors (including rivers and public rights of way)
- 1.49 Each typology section sets out the strategic context to that particular typology; the key themes emerging from the analysis of quality, quantity and accessibility; and the recommended quantity, quality and accessibility standards. The application of these standards and the resulting priorities forms the basis of the strategic framework for the delivery of open spaces across Bexley.
- 1.50 The Council commissioned a study by ERM<sup>9</sup> to help consider the impact of five different scenarios of population growth in Bexley, in relation to service requirements generated by different levels of house building (and in different locations in the Borough). The OSS has considered the impact of all five of these scenarios on the demands placed on open space provision.
- 1.51 The overall strategic framework for the provision and delivery of open space and sport and recreation facilities is set out in **Section 12**.
- 1.52 There are also a number of appendices that support the OSS, providing further background detail and statistical calculations. These are referenced throughout the Technical Paper.

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<sup>9</sup> Environmental Resources Management “Testing the Service Requirement Impacts of Future Housing Growth in Bexley” (June 2007)