



**Document Reference**  
**PS.EVR21**

East Cambridgeshire  
District Council

## **Policy LP21 – Open Space**

**November 2017**

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# 1. Introduction and Policy Context

## Introduction

- 1.1 East Cambridgeshire District Council is reviewing its Local Plan, which was last adopted in April 2015. The new Local Plan, which is hoped to be adopted in 2018, will provide a framework for development in the district until 2036 and beyond.
- 1.2 This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for policy LP21 (of the Proposed Submission Local Plan, November 2017), which relates to open space.

## National policy

- 1.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012 and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) was introduced in 2014 which offers 'live' government guidance.
- 1.4 Paragraph 73 of the NPPF is particularly relevant to this policy, stating: *“Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessment should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.”*
- 1.5 The above NPPF policy and NPPG guidance has been taken into account in preparing the Local Plan as a whole, and policy LP21 in particular.

# 2 East Cambridgeshire Context in Relation to Policy LP21

- 2.1 The provision of high quality, accessible open spaces and sports and recreation facilities makes an important contribution to the health and well-being and quality of life of residents. In addition well planned and maintained open spaces add to the quality of the built environment and offer opportunities for wildlife and habitat enhancement.
- 2.2 The intensive agriculture of fens in the northern part of the district, and stud uses associated with the horse racing industry in the south of the district restrict access to the open countryside for informal recreation beyond the use of public rights of way. The provision of new, and maintenance of existing, open spaces is of particular importance.
- 2.3 Within East Cambridgeshire there is a good distribution of open spaces with the majority of communities having access to at least one area of open or play space within a desirable walking distance. However, overall the amount of open space and play space is small in comparison to the population, and well below the standard of provision set out in the Developer Contributions SPD (2013).
- 2.4 As a separate but important issue, East Cambridgeshire is home to a number of international and national protected biodiversity sites, many of which are sensitive to 'recreational pressure'. It is therefore essential that new development provides additional open space, so as to not increase such pressure on those protected sites.

# 3 Local Plan Policy: Preliminary Draft

- 3.1 The Preliminary Draft Local Plan (February 2016) contained a policy entitled New Open Space. A number of representations were made on the policy, and in summary the key issues raised for the policy were:
- Comments broadly supporting the policy;
  - Detailed suggestions to improve clarity of wording;
  - Comments suggesting the policy needs substantial or significant rewording, especially in relation to: proposed standards; off-site provision.
- 3.2 In response to the comments received at the Preliminary Draft stage, together with further consideration of existing or new evidence, the policy was re-drafted for the Further Draft, and was significantly different to the Preliminary Draft version.
- 3.3 In order to address the comment relating to provision, the policy made it clear that the approach the Council will take will depend on the development size, with, in simple terms, larger sites required to provide space on site, whilst smaller sites will be expected to make a contribution to off-site improvements.
- 3.4 The policy clarified what would be expected for on-site provision and off-site provision.
- 3.5 The policy also dealt with Indoor Sports Facilities and Loss of Facilities.
- 3.6 The policy was, therefore, fundamentally different to the Preliminary Draft.

## 4 Local Plan Policy: Further Draft

- 4.1 The Further Draft was published for consultation in January – February 2017.
- 4.2 Various comments were received during the Further Draft consultation, either supporting the policy or expressing concern over certain aspects of the policy. In summary, the key issues raised for the policy were:
- Various comments broadly supporting elements of the policy;
  - Various comments suggesting the policy needs substantial or significant rewording, especially in relation to: mitigating effects on designated sites; the creation of native woodland; that site specific circumstances should determine whether provision is on or off-site; developments under 400 dwellings should make contributions towards sports facilities; an additional requirement should be added to secure adequate ancillary facilities alongside sports facilities.
  - Detailed suggestions for amendments to 'Part C' of the policy.
- 4.3 In response to the comments received at the Further Draft Stage, together with further consideration of existing or new evidence, the policy has been amended for the Proposed Submission version in the following ways.
- 4.4 In response to the comments made regarding the mitigation of effects of recreational pressure on designated sites, a new Part B has been introduced to 'flag up' that some development proposals may need to provide open space in excess of part A standards.
- 4.5 The policy has not been amended to cover woodland provision, though policy LP20 has had a substantial section added relating to trees and woodland.
- 4.6 An additional bullet point has also been included within the section relating to on-site provision to address the comment regarding ancillary facilities, this reads: "*where outdoor sports facilities are to be provided, include appropriate ancillary facilities for users;*".

- 4.7 A minor amendment has been made to the fourth bullet under 'On-Site Provision'. In response to a comment received, the word 'conservation' has been removed.
- 4.8 No changes have been made to the policy in respect of the comments relating to whether provision should be made on or off-site. The policy as worded is clear that providing the standards can be met appropriately, the developer can, in some instances, choose to make provision on or off site.
- 4.9 In respect of comments relating to on-site sports provision for sites under 400 dwellings, it is not considered that a development of this size would be large enough to provide sports pitches that would meet the requirements of the governing bodies. Indeed, using the councils open space standards as set out in the Developer Contributions SPD, 400 dwellings is the lowest number that would trigger a full size football pitch. In addition, there are limits to the number of sites where contributions collected through Section 106 can be pooled. As such, only where a site specific policy for a site under 400 dwellings requires such provision, should a developer be required to make provision. Where it is not required, then the developer will contribute to CIL, which could, as appropriate, be used for such new provision.
- 4.10 The suggested amendments to former Part C (now Part D) have not been undertaken as it would potentially result in an increased deficit of open space by not requiring a replacement of the same size.
- 4.11 A new Part B has been added relating to major development proposals and recreational pressure on designated sites. This is following concerns from Natural England, and is a matter added to the plan at various locations.
- 4.12 Part D (was C) has also been rephrased slightly, so as to fit better with NPPF policy. The sentiments remain the same.

## 5 Alternative Reasonable Options

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been considered for this policy. (Option 1 is the preferred policy approach which has been included in the Proposed Submission Local Plan.)
- 5.2 **Option 2:** No policy, and rely on national policy for this subject area.
- 5.3 **Option 3:** A policy seeking to protect existing, and provide new, open space to a higher standard, improving the level of provision.
- 5.4 **Option 4:** A policy insisting that all new open space is provided within the development site to which it applies.
- 5.5 **Option 5:** A policy that requires developers to provide financial contributions to improve existing open spaces.
- 5.6 All of the alternative options for this policy were rejected as, while they would have beneficial impacts on the level and/or quality of open space provision, they all raised potential issues of viability of development.

## 6 Conclusion

- 6.1 This Evidence Report demonstrates the rationale for the policy as contained in the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan (November 2017). It is hoped this helps demonstrate how we have responded to comments received during the consultation

stages, as well as how the latest evidence and national guidance has been taken into account.