

11. RECREATION, LEISURE AND CULTURE

- 11.1 This Section deals with activities which are carried out for relaxation or as pastimes during wakeful hours outside of employment. These activities range widely in intensity of participation and degree to which they have land use implications. They range from the passive enjoyment of open space and the countryside, through walking, riding and cycling to active participation in organised sports, the use of built structures in theme parks, the use of buildings and new development such as theatres, museums and libraries. With increased sophistication, the land use implications, which were once more concerned with land management, have become increasingly commercial with their own spin-offs, in terms of employment and economic benefits both directly and indirectly and by affecting the overall image of an area and its attractiveness as a place to live. In some cases, recreational facilities can become so significant that they attract staying visitors and thereby contribute to the tourism capital of the area. In other cases, such as museums and libraries, the recreational or leisure use is complementary to their academic and business service functions.
- 11.2 Because of this diversity of activities, there should also be reference to various other policy chapters. In particular for the more commercial, intensive or cultural facilities, town centre policies are relevant; on the other hand, the countryside and environmental policies are relevant to those outdoor pursuits which are based on these attractions. Of particular relevance in this latter respect are the National Forest and the Forest of Mercia Community Forest in which the creation of new recreational opportunities in association with appropriate woodland planting/landscaping is a vital part of their strategies. In addition, "movement" in itself can be a form of recreation; walking, running, cycling, flying. These topics are covered in the Transport and Accessibility Chapter.
- 11.3 With increased mobility, recreational activities have been increasingly associated with travel to and from the recreational venue. Some venues have become very popular as a result of this accessibility to the point where this popularity and pressures of use begin to detract from the original attraction. Both these aspects - travel and user pressure including effects on resource consumption and effects on biodiversity - stress the importance of sustainability to these matters as much as any other.

Providing for Recreation and Leisure

R1 Recreation and leisure developments should, where relevant:

- (a) provide facilities in or close to population centres;**
- (b) provide relief for over-used and/or more remote recreational areas;**
- (c) minimise potential conflict with other activities and wildlife interests;**
- (d) contribute to the reclamation and reuse of derelict or despoiled land;**
- (e) relate to existing or extended open space/public access systems, including public paths;**
- (f) be accessible by a variety of means of public and private transport.**

- 11.4 An essential part of sustainable development is seeking to reduce the length of journeys and the amount of travel. This can be achieved by providing facilities/developments close to the main areas of demand and ensuring accessibility by a wide range of means of travel but particularly by walking, cycling and public transport. To conserve the local natural resources for the benefit of future generations, it is vital that recreation and entertainment developments seek to recycle derelict and despoiled land, which has not gained significant wildlife value, and minimise impacts, both direct and indirect, on natural and cultural facilities.

Provision for Intensive Recreation

R2A Development of intensive recreation, entertainment and cultural facilities should, if possible, be located on sites in or on the edge of town centres which are, or will be made, highly accessible to public transport in accordance with Policies TC1 and TC3A. Where the type of proposed use necessitates a location for development away from town centres, a location within an urban area will be preferred. The need to seek sustainable development locations and comply with Policy D5B within Green Belt areas will still apply. The following considerations will be taken into account for all proposals for intensive recreation:

- (a) whether the land is derelict or has little agricultural or conservation value;**
- (b) whether the land or adjoining land has a protected nature conservation status (SSSI, SNCI, etc.);**
- (c) whether the new use would generate significant new traffic and be capable of being served by a variety of modes of transport, including walking, cycling and/or public transport;**
- (d) whether the development would harm the viability or vitality of existing or potential facilities at town centres within the anticipated catchment in accordance with Policy TC3B.**

Where inappropriate development is involved within the Green Belt, very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated.

- 11.5 Intensive recreation and entertainment and cultural facilities are frequently unrelated to any particular inherent features of a site. Consequently, in seeking appropriate locations for these activities, a sequential approach should be applied in accordance with Policies TC1 and TC3A. Emphasis should be given to the sustainable advantages of town centre and sequentially edge-of-town centre locations, recycling land and promoting the vitality and viability of the existing centres. In the larger urban areas, the successful provision and appropriate concentration of such facilities can provide more than proportional benefits in terms of usage and accessibility and prestige. The proposals for an enhanced "cultural quarter" in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent represent an example of the application of this policy. Conversely, there may be circumstances where, by virtue of the location of the necessary facilities and the nature of the land, locations away from town centres and urban areas generally are appropriate for more intensive development. The water area and land adjoining Chasewater in Lichfield District is considered to be such a location for future development, while Alton Towers in Staffordshire Moorlands is the ultimate example of a number of recreation and tourist facilities which have been established in rural areas as a result of particular sets of circumstances.

Chasewater

R2B Land at Chasewater within the Forest of Mercia, in Lichfield District, is proposed as a strategic recreation and leisure location of sub-regional significance to incorporate a country park, forest-related facilities and intensive outdoor recreation facilities.

- 11.6 Chasewater and surrounding land has and will continue to provide a variety of recreational facilities, many of which are essentially related to the water area which provides a focus of activity slightly removed from the edge of the urban area. Some more intensive or harder forms of development took place on the south shore (stadium, promenade, pools, pier and cafe) but have either become derelict or do not meet modern requirements. Considerable investment is required in the area to avoid further dereliction and remedy structural problems.
- 11.7 By virtue of its location on the edge of the West Midlands Conurbation and its accessibility to the existing A5 and the proposed Birmingham Northern Relief Road, the south shore of Chasewater is considered to have redevelopment potential for outdoor intensive recreational and leisure facilities of sub-regional as well as local significance
- 11.8 In addition, as part of the regeneration of the previously developed land on the south shore, the Forest of Mercia, in conjunction with local authority partners, propose the establishment of an Innovation Centre comprising a new administrative headquarters, a visitor centre, and micro-business units for forest-related activities, all aimed at stimulating the tourism potential of this location.
- 11.9 Away from the south shore, less intensive recreation facilities are to be preferred, including a country park. In consideration of any proposals, account should be taken of the need to protect the lowland heath to the north and east of Chasewater consistent with the designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Recreational Facilities in the Countryside

R3 Proposals for the development of facilities and the use of land and water resources for sport and recreation in the countryside away from the urban fringe will be permitted provided that:

- (a) they involve activities more suited to sites away from built-up areas;**
- (b) they will not have unacceptable adverse impacts on the environment, natural and cultural heritage areas with countryside protection, or Green Belt policies;**
- (c) any traffic generated can be accommodated on the road system without undue adverse effects;**
- (d) the form, bulk and general design of the development, including any necessary new buildings, respect the character of the countryside;**
- (e) they reuse existing buildings, wherever possible.**

- 11.10 While recognising that the countryside is the focus of much recreational activity, Policy R3 aims to protect the countryside for its own sake by seeking to restrict recreation related development that could and should be located elsewhere. Where development is considered appropriate, it should, wherever possible, make use of and respect existing buildings, surroundings and the landscape. Opportunities for recreational and environmental initiatives in the countryside may arise as a result of reclamation or restoration schemes, for example following minerals extraction.

Public Access Land

R4 Expansion of the total area of public access land and improvement of facilities in existing sites will be sought, where suitable opportunities and resources arise, in order to encourage fuller public participation in a range of sport, recreational, community and nature conservation activities. New provision must be accompanied by a comprehensive management plan. Subject to the availability of funds, an increase in the level of land with access to the public in Dosthill will be sought during the Plan period.

- 11.11 Public access land includes country parks and picnic places. Currently widely dispersed through the Plan area, they represent both a local recreational and a wider tourism resource. While there may be potential for further provision in absolute terms and in relation to on-site facilities, severe constraints on public sector finances will limit local authorities' ability to acquire and maintain new facilities.
- 11.12 Provision by the County Council of a Community Country Park at Apedale in Newcastle Borough on land previously worked by British Coal is the realisation of a longstanding commitment. At Dosthill, near Tamworth, options to increase public access to land which has been largely worked for aggregates are being evaluated, following the completion of a feasibility study. Private sector investment (and joint schemes) will be encouraged as appropriate, including new public access opportunities which arise as a result of the National and Community Forest initiatives. Any new provision must be accompanied by a comprehensive management plan comprising a development plan and a business plan to ensure the long term maintenance and safeguarding of the facility.

Water Areas and Rivers

R5A Subject to the need to maintain supplies of water for domestic and industrial use, and to locational and environmental considerations, proposals for the more effective use of existing and new water resources (rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) for sport, recreation and/or wildlife and education will be supported.

- 11.13 While seeking to ensure that existing and future water resources are used to the full, Policy R5A highlights the need for an overall balance amongst the various alternative activities and uses. In some cases, only one particular use may be acceptable.

The Tame and Trent Valley

R5B A comprehensive land use management strategy involving an integrated approach to the provision of a range of recreational and environmental initiatives along the Tame and Trent Valley will be sought, together with the provision of related infrastructure.

11.14 The Tame and Trent Valleys offer future potential for recreational opportunities and environmental enhancement following the completion of extensive areas of mineral working and gravel extraction. A land use management strategy for the Tame Valley south of Tamworth and into Warwickshire should address the extent to which the recreational opportunities of the area can be managed and environmental improvement secured. The strategy will be linked to the Central Rivers project, which has considered the feasibility of initiatives in the context of a long term vision for improvement and enhancement of the landscape of the Tame Valley north of Tamworth and Trent Valley between Alrewas and Burton.

Open Space in Urban Areas

R6 The provision of open space within urban areas will be sought, having regard to:

- (a) the standard of 2.43 ha. per 1,000 population being used as a baseline level of provision in conjunction with any available assessments of need for specific sports and recreation activities and other local circumstances; and**
- (b) the retention of existing public open spaces and playing fields owned by public, private or voluntary organisations and required to meet open space standards referred to above, land of especial ecological or visual value or forming an important link in the urban open space network. Their development for other purposes will not be permitted except where it can be shown by the would-be developer that the development of a small part of the site would allow the retention and enhancement of facilities; alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available; or there is an excess of provision for sports, recreation and amenity purposes.**

11.15 This policy concurs with the national planning advice given in PPG17. While commending the National Playing Fields Association's recommended minimum standard for outdoor playing space, the policy, and guidance, recognise that circumstances differ greatly from one area to another. Local plan authorities should draw up their own standards of provision based on their own assessment of need across the whole, or if appropriate, with respect to the various separate parts, of the district. These local assessments should include consideration of types of housing, age structure (short and long term effects), and the wider distribution of open space and its accessibility. For example, Tamworth Borough Council has adopted a higher open space standard to take account of its young age structure. With regard to planning sports provision generally, regard should be had to the policies and standards recommended by Sport England and the guidance for local authorities and others involved in recreational planning provided by its regional office. Agreements with developers are likely to be sought to meet the appropriate levels of provision.

11.16 Existing open space and playing fields should be protected inasmuch as the locally determined standards may be undermined by their loss. As with the determination of those standards, local circumstances should be taken into consideration, including an assessment of different types of facility (grass, all-weather, indoor, etc.) and the maintenance of an open space network where appropriate. Any proposal to develop sports fields if opposed by Sport England will be referred to the DETR.

Canal Facilities

R7 New canal facilities and associated services, such as moorings, service facilities, marinas, hire and trip boat facilities, information points, restaurants and heritage attractions should be sited in or adjacent to towns, villages and canal junctions, subject to the need to protect the countryside and Conservation Areas. Canalside development should contribute positively to the function and appearance of canals, wherever possible, providing new life for redundant buildings. The wildlife value of canals is recognised and will be conserved and enhanced.

11.17 Canals contribute significantly to the heritage of Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent and provide a distinctive focus for recreation and tourism activities. Many canals are already protected as Conservation Areas with consideration being given to extended coverage. Improvements to the provision of visitor and interpretation services on the canal network are sought, whilst ensuring conservation of their scenic, architectural and historic character. Their value as wildlife habitats and open space corridors, often penetrating right into the heart of urban areas is recognised.

Restoration of Canals

R8 Proposals for the restoration of former canals will be supported, having regard to the benefits to the canal system, urban regeneration and the impact on the nature conservation value of the land and any extant water.

11.18 The restoration of former canals can provide wide-ranging benefits, both operational and environmental. Parts of the canal system in southern Staffordshire are currently disconnected culs-de-sac, e.g. the Wyrley and Essington Canal where restoration of the former links would provide the opportunity to recreate through routes of recreational and potential economic value. Through urban areas, canal restoration can form the focus for imaginative and wide-ranging urban regeneration schemes. The routes of disused canals which have potential for restoration should be protected from adverse developments which would hinder their possible reconstruction.

11.19 However, the line of the disused canal may have acquired an enhanced nature conservation or environmental value by virtue of the particular circumstances along the former route. This enhanced value will need to be assessed in consideration of any redevelopment proposal. In any restoration scheme, the water source for the canal should be identified at an early stage in the planning process and an assessment made of the potential impact on existing water resources.