

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 10 JANUARY 2012  
title: FUTURE OPEN SPACE PROVISION  
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES  
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## 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members on the proposals from the working group.
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's priorities:
  - This report contributes to – Making People's Lives safer and healthier

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July, members agreed to the formation of an officer/member working group to explore the development of CPM space policies in the new Core Strategy.
- 2.2 As current guidance was limited, there was also a need, given the number of current and potential planning applications, to have evidence to strengthen the council's negotiations around Section 106 agreements and associated commuted sums.
- 2.3 Equally important for committee was any ongoing revenue implications of adopting facilities such as play areas, after developments had been completed.

## 3 ISSUES

The working group has met twice and explored the following areas:

- 3.1 An analysis of current open space provision
  - 3.2 Developing an evidence base for future developments
  - 3.3 Determining future priorities
  - 3.4 Minimising financial impact to the Council
- 3.1 **Analysis of Current Open Space Provision** – Generally speaking, most of the Ribble Valley, including its most urban areas, has good access to some form of open space, whether that be formal or informal. An analysis, carried out by Sports Development staff, has identified 130 locations that are easily recognisable as open space. These include schools, parks, football pitches, play areas, sports clubs and village greens. The key issue identified as part of the analysis was the standard or condition of some facilities (play areas, in particular), and whether the right facilities were available in the right areas (geographic spread and appropriate age ranges). The overall conclusion was that facilities, particularly play areas, tended to focus on younger children rather than teenagers, did not provide exciting or innovative play opportunities, and were beginning to show signs of a lack of investment.
  - 3.2 **Developing an Evidence Base for Future Developments** – It is clear from the audit that investment in current facilities needs to be given priority, and that the range of opportunities needs to include teenage provision. Apart from a physical

analysis, further evidence exists through consultation with young people themselves, particularly through the work of the Ribble Valley Children's Trust and Community Safety Partnership. Historically, there has been a requirement for developers to provide some form of open space on sites greater than one hectare. More often than not, this has resulted in a small play area for younger children with a limited range of equipment in an isolated corner of a development that could not fit on a housing plot. There was rarely an analysis on whether the open space provision matched the likely age profile of the development, and meant there was no flexibility for any future changes to the profile. As a result, we have a number of facilities that are no longer fit for purpose.

**3.3 Determining Future Priorities** – the overall view of the working group was that the Council's future strategy should be to improve existing provision where developments were within a reasonable distance, unless developments were of such a scale that existing provision could not cater for additional demand. There should also be a more creative approach to the type of provision. The key recommendations are, therefore:

- (a) within large-scale developments, it will be the responsibility of the developer to propose the most appropriate open space provision, based on the likely demographics. This could include on-site provision for all age groups, or a combination of on- and off-site provision, depending on location.
- (b) Within small-scale developments, there would be an expectation that a contribution would be made for improvements to the nearest local provision. Such provision may not be in the control of the Borough Council, but it is important that we manage any negotiations to ensure that facilities are matched against identified needs.
- (c) The development of facilities for teenagers should be given priority, identifying a number of key sites that could accommodate future development.

**3.4 Minimising Financial Impact to the Council** – previous arrangements have resulted in short-term support to the Council via commuted sums for new facilities, but left long-term revenue implications for their future maintenance and improvements. The recommendation of the working group is, therefore:

- (a) that any ongoing revenue costs associated with new facilities be the responsibility of the developer, but the Council ensures that such facilities are appropriate for the given development.
- (b) That any commuted sums relating to smaller developments be used to improve existing infrastructure in line with identified priorities. If such a facility is owned by a town or parish council, then the Borough Council will be the first point of contact to ensure we keep a strategic overview. There also may be cases where funding is split between a variety of deliverers.

## **4 RISK ASSESSMENT**

Approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – the proposals maintain a commitment by developers to contribute to the future provision of public open space and supports improvements to existing sites.

- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – it is important that such proposals have a strong evidence-base in order to minimise challenges by potential developers.
- **Political** – Robust policies/guidance will help the Council achieve contributions from developers.
- **Reputation** – as many developments will have some controversy attached to them, securing additional or improved open space provision for local communities will be a positive factor.

## **5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Notes the contents of the report and endorses the proposals of the working group.
- 5.2 Asks officers to incorporate the proposals in the future Core Strategy, backed up by additional evidence, where needed.

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