

ANGUS COUNCIL

PLANNING AND TRANSPORT POLICY COMMITTEE 29 AUGUST 1996

SUBJECT: NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY GUIDELINE SPORT, PHYSICAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF PLANNING, TRANSPORT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract: This Report outlines Government policy on sport, physical recreation and open space in Scotland published recently as a National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) by the Scottish Office. The NPPG reinforces the importance of the Development Plan system in the provision and protection of sports and open space facilities. The NPPG also emphasises the importance of involving the Scottish Sports Council (SSC) as a formal consultee in the planning process. The document gives guidance on a wide variety of sports types and their needs. The NPPG recognises the need for sustainable development in the provision and protection of such sites and emphasises the importance of the retention of school facilities and land for sporting uses. This Report provides a synopsis of the main policy statements of the NPPG and highlights particular aspects of interest and, where appropriate, implications for Angus.

1 RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Committee -

- i. note and generally accept the advice contained in the NPPG on Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space;
- ii. agree that the NPPG will be taken into account in the preparation of appropriate policy statements - Angus and Dundee Structure Plan and Angus Local Plan.
- iii. agree that the Report be referred to the Recreation and Cultural Services Committee for its interest.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Scottish Office has recently issued the finalised version of the National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) No.11 on Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space. A consultative draft version of the NPPG was published in August 1995. A copy of the NPPG is available for reference at the Members' Lounge, The Cross, Forfar.
- 2.2 One of the underlying aims of the NPPG is to safeguard playing fields and sports pitches by discouraging redevelopment where it is likely to conflict with local needs, either now or in the future. The guidance also sets out the objectives that Local Authorities should seek to achieve in planning for sport, recreation and open space, including levels and quality of provision.

- 2.3 This Report provides a synopsis of the main points raised by the NPPG, sets out where major changes have occurred in the preparation of the finalised document, and highlights implications for planning policies in Angus.

3 MAIN POINTS RAISED BY NPPG11

Sustainable Development

- 3.1 One of the principal points raised by the NPPG is the importance of sustainable development in sports and recreation provision and the role that environmental impact studies can play in assessing development suitability. The NPPG advocates a precautionary approach where doubts are raised over any such development and highlights the important consultative role that the Scottish Sports Council (SSC) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have to play in this respect.

Scottish Sports Council and Scottish Natural Heritage

- 3.2 Changes to the GDPO (General Development Procedure Order) will result in the Scottish Sports Council becoming a statutory consultee for developments likely to prejudice or lead to the loss of land used for playing fields. For interest, a playing field is defined "as land of 0.4 hectares or more for any pitch sports, including any adjacent tennis courts or bowling green or athletic tracks". In addition, Local Authorities are advised to consult with the SSC on development plans and also proposals including new provision or loss of sports facilities, residential development of 300 houses or more likely to generate a need for new recreational provision and mineral developments which may present opportunities for recreation. Until the SSC is afforded statutory consultee status under the GDPO, Local Authorities are expected to consult the Council on a non-statutory basis for all new applications received from 1 July 1996.
- 3.3 In terms of countryside recreation, the NPPG highlights the role of Scottish Natural Heritage particularly in relation to land use management needs and issues. It also emphasises the relationship with local authorities and other agencies etc. in recreational provision.

Local Authorities

- 3.4 The role of Councils as enablers and providers of a wide range of recreation opportunities is emphasised. It is noted that Councils have the sole remit for play provision for the under five's. The NPPG sets out a series of planning objectives to be met by Councils. These include working under the guiding principles of sustainable development, meeting local sporting and recreational needs in their area, safeguarding open space and recreation facilities, ensuring access to such facilities and minimising crime opportunities in public spaces. The NPPG emphasises the need for Authorities to identify recreational land use requirements and resist pressure for the disposal of such land.

Levels of Provision

- 3.5 With regard to the provision of sports and recreation facilities, Councils are advised to carry out analysis of their area and seek to remedy deficiencies through the Development Plan system. Local standards for facilities and open space including design standards should be set in Plans and used as a basis for development control. Identification of open spaces which are to be safeguarded from development should be undertaken. Development Plan powers should include criteria against which Councils may be prepared to consider redevelopment of facilities. The NPPG advocates use of the SSC Facilities Planning Model by Planning Authorities as a basis to establish facilities distribution, local sporting demand and the potential need for additional facilities in their areas.

Open Space

- 3.6 The importance of public parks and amenity open spaces is highlighted. In general public parks should be safeguarded from development and where appropriate, consideration given to the use of Conservation Area designation to secure long term protection. Amenity open space within development particularly in housing areas should also be protected and enhanced.

Playing Fields and Sports Pitches

- 3.7 The significance to both the community and the environment of all playing fields and sports pitches is stressed. In particular, it is noted the contribution that school facilities can make to the local community. The NPPG indicates that disposal of "school land and buildings should only be entertained if analysis concludes that the land is surplus to requirements taking account of both its recreational and amenity value". Planning permission for alternative use should only be granted if it has been established that the land or buildings will not be required in future by either the school or community. As indicated in para 3.2 above, the SSC will now become a statutory consultee on this type of matter. The NPPG also indicates that there should be a presumption against redevelopment of playing fields or sports pitches, public or private. Particular attention should be given to any redevelopment scheme, and the NPPG, outlines the type of criteria that should be used as a guide to assessment.

Intensive Sports Facilities

- 3.8 Intensive sports facilities, e.g. sports halls, swimming pools etc. also provide a wide range of activities and are a focus for the community. Particular care will require to be given to the siting of intensive facilities, location number, environmental impact etc. The NPPG outlines general criteria for assessment of new facilities, and particularly the need to protect residential amenity, provide for the disabled; minimise the impact of noise and light pollution; give priority to locations which are accessible by walking, cycling or public transport; set car parking standards compatible with the above; and identify in a Local Plan a suitable site for a council's own proposals.

Access Routes and Rights of Way

- 3.9 The NPPG reinforces the importance of access routes and rights of way and stresses the need to protect by way of Local Plan policies asserted public Rights of Way. Local Authorities are also required to take into account the recreational potential of former railway land and tracks and where appropriate Local Plans should contain policies to safeguard their potential for recreational use, nature conservation and for possible return to transportation use.

Countryside Issues

- 3.10 The NPPG recognises the importance of the urban fringe for sports and recreation purposes. Favourable consideration should be given to Community Woodland and agricultural diversification initiatives for recreational purposes. Importance is also attached to enhancing the network of local public paths.
- 3.11 The countryside in general provides a wide range of venues for sports and recreational activities, including informal recreation such as hill walking, and organised sports such as horse trials, orienteering etc. The NPPG recognises the needs of rural residents and suggests that use be made of existing school premises, pitches, village halls etc. as a means of meeting community need.
- 3.12 Provision of sports and recreation facilities, in rural areas, can also contribute to population retention, promotion of towns, and therefore the local economy. The important element is the balance between activities and environment. Reference is made to other national guidance, such as NPPG3 - Land for housing; PAN43 Golf Courses on Associated development and the increasing importance of nature conservation, landscape and cultural heritage designations. Planning in the form of Local Plan, development control and use of management agreements, Section 50's etc. all play an important part in reconciling environmental, economic and sporting objectives.

Specific Sports

- 3.13 The NPPG also sets out additional guidelines for specific sports requirements including sports stadia, golf, water, air and motor sports, shooting, cycling and war-games. These include tackling issues such as public safety, protection of natural habitats including water, and measures to minimise noise and light pollution. A separate draft NPPG on skiing developments was published in February 1996. (Report 258/96 to the Planning and Transport Policy Committee on 25 April 1996 refers)

4 CHANGES SINCE DRAFT NPPG

- 4.1 There have been several changes made to the NPPG between its draft and finalised stages. The inclusion of open space in the title of the document reinforces the importance of this aspect of sport and recreation. The finalised NPPG sets out the criteria within which the Scottish Sports Council will be consulted by Local Authorities

when determining planning applications. It further introduces the concept of the precautionary approach under the auspices of sustainable development.

- 4.2 The finalised NPPG affords considerable weight to the use of Section 50 Agreement and planning conditions to assure maintenance of quality of facilities and open space. In addition, Local Authorities, having derived standards for open space provision, are required by the finalised NPPG to state them in development plans as a basis for development control. This was not contained in the draft NPPG.
- 4.3 Comments were requested at draft NPPG stage on the disposal of school buildings and land for new development purposes. The finalised NPPG11 states that disposals should only be entertained if open space analysis demonstrates that the land is surplus to requirements, taking account of recreational and amenity value. This is supported by a presumption against the redevelopment of playing fields and sports pitches, public or private.
- 4.4 In relation to public Rights of Way the finalised NPPG drops the requirement of Local Authorities to record public Rights of Way and publish a map. However, information held by Councils on Rights of Way should continue to be made available to the public.
- 4.5 In relation to environmental protection the NPPG has been amended to include reference to Special Protection Areas (SPA's), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's), National Nature Reserves (NNR) and RAMSAR Sites. Within rural areas in general the NPPG affords greater importance in its finalised form to the requirement for planning policies to provide for sporting and recreational needs, especially in relation to all weather facilities.
- 4.6 The finalised NPPG introduces a requirement for Local Authorities to adopt a strategic approach to identifying and protecting wider resources taking into account the factors of overcrowding and access across land. This requirement has been added since the draft consultation stage.

5 ACTION REQUIRED BY NPPG

- 5.1 Local Authorities are encouraged to undertake analysis of, and through the Development Plan process provide protection for, recreation and sports facilities and open spaces. Local Authorities are also required to consult with the Scottish Sports Council, Scottish Natural Heritage and other relevant bodies where necessary over development applications which affect such sites.
- 5.2 Development Plans should protect existing facilities and open spaces and guide future development through land use policies and proposals.
- 5.3 Structure Plans should recognise the strategic importance of sports and recreation, and provide guidance to Local Plans identifying existing facilities, deficiencies and the scope for major new developments. They should indicate general locations for strategic or nationally important facilities whilst at the same time identifying sensitive environmental areas where such development is inappropriate.

- 5.4 Local Plans will, on a site specific basis, indicate how new sporting, recreation and open space developments will be provided for, controlled and protected. Policies for the protection of existing facilities should also be shown.
- 5.5 The NPPG also provides guidance for Development Control purposes including definition of bad neighbour development, the use of Environmental Assessment, conditions and planning agreements.

6 DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The NPPG emphasises the need for Local Authorities to identify land use requirements for sport, recreation and open space and to resist pressures for disposal of existing facilities where they contribute to local need. Under these guidelines the Scottish Sports Council also becomes a statutory consultee on development proposals affecting playing fields. The NPPG also recognises the need to consult agencies involved in sports planning in order to achieve consistent planning policies.
- 6.2 One of the main points of action identified by the NPPG is the recommendation that Local Authorities undertake a comprehensive survey of sports facilities in their area as a basis for policy preparation.
- 6.3 As part of the preparation of the Tayside Structure Plan 1993 surveys were undertaken by the Scottish Sports Council which indicated provision in Angus for the more popular "intensive sports" including swimming, athletics, golf courses, sports halls, ice rinks, squash courts, indoor bowling, tennis courts, bowling greens and football, rugby, hockey and multi-purpose pitches. The Scottish Sports Council were also commissioned to provide an overview of the need for swimming pools, sports halls and golf courses using the SSC computerised Facilities Planning Model. The results of the study, which indicate that there is generally a good distribution of these facilities in Angus and the former Tayside area, have been incorporated into the Finalised Tayside Structure Plan 1993.
- 6.4 The Tayside Structure Plan 1993 provides relevant strategic planning guidance on sport and recreation which is generally endorsed by the terms of this NPPG and which will be further applied and detailed through the preparation of the Angus Local Plan including:
- rural recreational access and urban fringe strategies to support the development of informal recreation and improved access to the countryside
 - water catchment management studies to identify opportunities for, and constraints on, increased recreational use
 - encouragement of winter sports in general and ski-ing in particular
 - encouragement for provision of golf courses and other major sports facilities including jointly promoting such provision with local communities and the private sector.
- 6.5 In terms of facilities provision the former Angus District and Tayside Regional Councils recognised the importance of sports and recreation to the community and this has resulted in modern in-door sports facilities at each of the main towns based

either as a stand alone facility or as dual use basis with schools. Upgrading of outdoor sports facilities has also been undertaken at Forfar sports centre and a programme of environmental improvements of outdoor recreation areas at Arbroath and Carnoustie seafronts. Public parks continue to be maintained to a high standard and a programme of upgrading play equipment undertaken. In terms of countryside recreation there are country park designations at Forfar Loch, Monikie and Crombie. Support for village halls and other local amenities has also been made through grant assistance for improvements. In broad terms, therefore, existing facilities and open space provision and management accord with the principles established by the NPPG and provide a sound basis for further development of sports and recreation in Angus.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this Report.

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Director of Law and Administration, Director of Finance and Director of Leisure and Recreation Services have been consulted in the preparation of this Report.

9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 The recently published NPPG on Sport, Physical Recreation and Open Space confirms the important role that the planning system has in the provision and protection of sporting and recreation facilities. It sets out the broad approach which the Secretary of State will have in mind when considering sports and recreation policies and development proposals which come before him. It also sets out action required to be taken by Planning Authorities in the preparation of Development Plans and in the assessment of planning applications.
- 9.2 The finalised NPPG safeguards playing fields and sports pitches by discouraging redevelopment where this conflicts with local needs. It requires that the Scottish Sports Council be consulted in all proposals that affects such fields and pitches. Changes to the GDPO will afford statutory consultee status to the SSC in future. As of 1 July 1996 and until this status is confirmed, Local Authorities are expected to consult the SSC on a non-statutory basis on all new sports-related development.
- 9.3 The NPPG also places an emphasis on Structure and Local Plans to provide policy guidance which meets long and short term local sporting needs. This includes identifying deficiencies, encouraging suitable additional provision and protecting existing facilities. Much of the guidance in the NPPG is reflected in the finalised Tayside Structure Plan 1993. Information provided by the Scottish Sports Council and its Facilities Planning Model was used in the preparation of this document. This takes into account local circumstances in Angus and will, in turn, be further detailed through the preparation of the Angus Local Plan.

NOTE

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above Report.

AA/RM/rj

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