

Examination of the Tunbridge Wells
Borough Local Plan

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
Hearing Statement

**Matter 13: Landscape, Local
Green Space and Open Space,
Sport and Recreation (Policies
STR8, EN8, EN15, EN16, EN17,
EN18, EN19, OSSR1 and OSSR2)
Issue 6: Retention and Provision of
Open Space**

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Matter 13 – Landscape, Local Green Space and Open Space, Sport and Recreation (Policies STR8, EN8, EN15, EN16, EN17, EN18, EN19, OSSR1 and OSSR2)

Issue 6 – retention and provision of Open Space

Inspector's Question 1: [re. Policy OSSR 1]

Is Policy OSSR1 consistent with paragraph 99 of the Framework?

TWBC response to Question 1

1. Paragraph 99 of the NPPF requires that *“Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:*
 - a) *An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
 - b) *The loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
 - c) *The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use”.*
2. Policy OSSR 1 - Retention of Open Space, provides the policy approach for the retention of open space across the borough.
3. The Council is of the view that Policy OSSR 1 is consistent with paragraph 99 of the NPPF and highlights that the approach has been endorsed by Sport England.
4. The policy makes provision for the retention of existing open space, sport and recreational buildings and land, unless allocated for another purpose/use/development

in the Local Plan. A number of criteria are included within the policy which address the requirements of criteria a-c of paragraph 99 as referred to above. Specifically, in relation to the criteria, the following is covered within Policy OSSR 1 –

- a) – *Assessment to be undertaken which show the buildings or land to be surplus to requirements* – This is covered within criteria 1) of Policy OSSR 1.
- b) – *The loss resulting from proposed development to be replaced by equivalent or better provision* – This is covered within criteria 2) of Policy OSSR 2.
- c) – *Development is for an alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which outweigh the loss of the current or former use* – This is covered by criteria 3) of Policy OSSR 3.

5. Policy OSSR 1 also provides the further consideration for decision makers on the approach to proposals for mixed use schemes with demonstratable open space, sports and recreational provision, and guidance on recreational buildings.
6. It is considered that this approach is in conformity with the general thrust of paragraph 99 of the NPPF.

Inspector's Question 2: [re. Policy OSSR 2]

What are the standards in Policy OSSR2 based on and are they justified and effective?

TWBC response to Question 2

Introduction

7. Paragraph 98 of the NPPF requires “*Access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the need for open space, sport and recreation facilities (including quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses) and opportunities for new provision. Information gained from assessments should be used to determine what open space, sport and recreational provision is needed, which plans then seek to accommodate*”.
8. Policy OSSR 2 sets out the approach towards the provision of publicly accessible open space and recreation across the borough.

Consideration

9. The Council has commissioned a number of evidence base studies in relation to sport and recreation which has informed the approach and policies within the Local Plan. This includes the following:
 - The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Open Space, Sport and Recreation Study (2013-2033) – June 2018 carried out by Ethos Planning [[CD 3.26ci](#)]
 - Tunbridge Wells Borough Community and Stakeholder Consultation Report – June 2018 carried out by Ethos Planning [[CD 3.26a](#)]
 - Tunbridge wells Indoor, Built, Sports Facility Needs Assessment – June 2018 carried out by Ethos Planning [[CD 3.26b](#)]
 - Tunbridge Wells Playing Pitch Study – Carried out by Strategic Leisure – November 2017 [[CD 3.26d](#)]

10. All of the above studies have been carried out alongside consultation with the relevant bodies and organisations and have been endorsed by Sport England.
11. The standards provided for within Policy OSSR 2 have been derived from the work carried out by Ethos Planning. Paragraph 6.591 of the Local Plan refers to this and explains that “*The standards have been derived following the completion of an assessment of local needs and an audit of current provision and are minimum guidance levels of provision*”.
12. Commentary is provided within the Open Space Study [[CD 3.26ci](#)] on the determination of the standards and in particular reference to the “*Fields In Trust*” (FIT) guidance, previously known as the National Play Fields Association, which provides benchmark guidelines for outdoor sport and recreation. However, this guidance, as referred to in paragraph 6.3.1 of the Open Space Study [[CD 3.26ci](#)], considers that the quantity guidelines should be adjusted to take account of local circumstances and that FIT accepted the importance of developing locally researched standards (paragraph 6.4.2).
13. This is discussed further at subsequent sections of the Open Space Study [[CD 3.26ci](#)] where it is also set out at paragraph 6.5.2 that the provision of children’s play space in accordance with the FIT guidelines standards has been criticised “*because they are often seen as undeliverable, and can result in a proliferation of play areas that can be difficult to maintain, as well as setting unrealistic aspirations in urban areas where insufficient land is available to provide facilities, especially higher density development in brownfield sites*”.
14. Therefore, local standards have been derived for the borough, as set out at Section 6 of the Open Space Study [[CD 3.26ci](#)] and these standards are set out within Policy OSSR 2 of the Local Plan, within Tables 15, 16 and 17.
15. Additionally, Paragraph 6.596 and Policy OSSR 2 refers to the fact that further detail will be provided within an Open Space Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will provide further detail to support the implementation of policy. The Council have committed to the production of this SPD within the Local Development Scheme (LDS) [[CD 3.143](#)] as detailed at paragraph 2.37.
16. In summary, the above approach is in conformity with the general thrust of the NPPF.