

Save Newcastle Wildlife - DAP Statement

This statement sets out our concerns regarding DAP Policies DM30 and DM31, which we contend are unsound and provides evidence in relation to the Inspector's MIQs on these specific policies. We have included our suggested amendments and maintain our objections, as previously submitted, to other policies in the draft and submission draft DAP, but will rely on our earlier written representations for these policies, to be taken into account by the Inspector.

1. Policy DM30 - Protecting Open Space, Sports and Recreational Buildings

OPEN SPACE, SPORTS AND RECREATIONAL PROVISION

There are a number of references to 'Open Space, Sports and Recreational Buildings' in the DAP text. The proposed wording, particularly with regard to the policy title of DM30, does not provide a proper description of the various elements of provision, to which the policy should relate. The NPPF refers to opportunities for sport and 'physical activity', recreational 'provision' (para 96) and recreational buildings 'and land' (para 97). This patently includes open space which functions as a recreational resource, however, the policy title, as currently drafted, could be construed as referring only to open space and 'buildings' which provide facilities for outdoor sport. Although recreational 'land' is referred to in the actual policy, this could be interpreted as referring to land that is ancillary to a building itself rather than a recreational space in its own right, because of the misleading title.

Suggested Amendment:

We therefore suggest amending the policy title and other references to the all-encompassing: 'Open Space, Sports and Recreational Provision'.

MITIGATING LOSS OF OPEN SPACE

Para 6.16.9 refers to the need to offset loss of open space (where there is an under-provision) by the creation of, or financial contribution towards, an alternative site of at least equal size, accessibility, and quality located in the same residential neighbourhood or where this is not possible, the same ward as the development site. The option to accept a financial contribution towards

an existing open space could however be inconsistent with the NPPF, which requires the replacement to be equivalent or better provision in terms of quality and quantity (para 97 b).

Suggested Amendment:

Redraft the relevant text to ensure conformity with the NPPF para 97 b.

ACCESSIBILITY OF COMPENSATORY OPEN SPACE

We have concerns regarding the reference, in para 6.16.9, to offsetting open space through alternative provision within the same Ward as the application site (to be considered where it is not possible to provide such replacement within the same residential area). We consider that there can be flaws in the assessment of open space when done on a Ward basis, as alternative open spaces can be an hour's walk or more, but still be within the same Ward. It is much more appropriate to consider the location of an alternative site in terms of walking distance standards, which may indeed be within the same Ward, but equally a site within an adjacent Ward may be more accessible to those residents most affected by the loss of open space.

Suggested amendment: Some residential areas (e.g. close to the edges of Ward boundaries) could benefit from new provision in the neighbouring Ward, if easily accessible on foot, and this option should be acknowledged in the supporting text of the DAP. Emphasis should be on the needs of the specific locality rather than the Ward as a whole.

DEFINING NEIGHBOURHOOD PARKS, LOCAL PARKS AND RECREATIONAL GROUNDS

The accompanying text to DM30 needs to include reference to the definition of a public park, to ensure clarity and an effective policy. Extant policy (saved UDP policy OS1.2) refers to the requirement for most residents to be within 500 metres walk of a Park, of a minimum of 6 hectares in size. The need for appropriate provision and access to Parks (in terms of required size and function) is restated in the Council's previously-approved supplementary planning guidance, which supports UDP policy OS1.2. Notably: 'Green Spaces...Your Spaces (2004) and 'Public Green Space, Sports and Recreation (GSSR) Needs and Opportunities (2009) and its Addendum (2013). The DAP, however, leaves a policy vacuum in failing to address the need to set out a

proper definition of the 'Parks and Recreation Grounds' typology.

Suggested Amendments:

Additional supporting text is therefore required to clarify that Parks should be sized as follows:

2 + ha for recreation grounds

6+ ha for local parks

10+ ha for neighbourhood parks.

We suggest that revised Supplementary Planning Guidance is urgently required to update the GSSR (2013) document and ensure sufficient clarity on standards, benefits and multi-functionality of parks. This should refer to Fields in Trust recommendations for quantitative assessment and refer to the national benchmark quality standard ('Green Flag') in assessing quality of provision.

STANDARDS FOR PARKS/RECREATION GROUNDS AND SPORTS PITCHES

We contend it is wrong to include Sports pitches provision in the same standard as Parks and Recreation Grounds, requiring an overall standard of 0.80 hectares per 1,000 of the population. This reflects a massive reduction in overall standards, given that the most recently approved standards are for a standard of 1 hectare per 1000 population for 'larger Green spaces' and a separate standard of 1.1 hectares per 1000 population for 'Sports and Recreation facilities' (GSSR Addendum document, 2013).

We are particularly concerned that this error would leave the City's existing Parks susceptible to development pressures, if there is deemed to be an 'over-provision', based on a simplistic and inappropriate application of the standard of 0.80 hectares per 1000 population. There is no proper justification for this standard; it has been lifted from the Newcastle Open Space Assessment 2016-30 (NOSA), which appears to base the standard on an over-simplistic calculation: adding up the overall Parks provision in the City in hectares and dividing that figure by the existing population of the City.

This is a crude approach, which would not be effective, nor is it appropriate in terms of the need to take account of local circumstances. The GSSR (2009) document includes a plan showing access to Parks (page 20). This Plan remains up to date because there has been no new provision of Parks within the last 10

years. The plan shows that the majority of the City's population does not have access to Parks within 15 minutes walk from home. Even on the basis proposed in the DAP, the standard is below the City average level of provision of 0.89 hectares per 1000 population referred to in the NOSA. A more effective approach would be a standard of 2 hectares per 1,000 of the population for existing provision, whilst emphasising that existing neighbourhood and local parks represent minimum quantitative levels of provision for the areas they serve, and should therefore be sacrosanct.

Officers have failed to consider the character of Newcastle's urban and suburban areas; many of these areas are predominantly terraced Victorian housing and 'Tyneside flats', which have no private amenity space, except for rear yards. In other areas (e.g. Kenton, West Denton and Kingston Park) there are large amounts of amenity green space that help to compensate for the lack of accessibility to Parks. The DAP should therefore acknowledge that perceived 'over-provision' of amenity green space is often unfounded because it usually relates to areas that have unsatisfactory accessibility to Parks. We have seen many of the City's precious open spaces granted planning permission for affordable housing in recent years, submitted by, or on behalf of, the Council's Fairer Housing Unit. The areas in question often suffered from a shortfall of Parks provision, however, officers failed to acknowledge that amenity green space can compensate for such shortfalls, without any need for 'reconfiguration'.

The NOSA (2016-2030) includes pitches in the Parks and Recreational grounds typology where they form part and parcel of Parks and are freely publicly accessible, but also includes standalone pitches which are not publicly accessible for informal recreation, for example at Newcastle Great Park. If a joint standard is adopted, it would be wrong to include pitches within this typology where they are fenced and are only available for pre-booked team sports. This must be made clear in the supporting text to the policy.

Suggested amendments:

- An overall standard equating to a minimum of 2 hectares per 1000 population for existing provision would be appropriate if the two typologies are now to be considered under the same standard.
- additional text needed stating that the standards are for minimum guidance levels of provision (as per section 6.1 of the NOSA).
- additional bullet point needed at para 6.16.7 to state: where there is a

shortfall of Parks provision, there is a need to protect a greater quantity of amenity green space, over and above minimum standards, in providing for informal recreational needs.

- additional text needed to explain that sports pitches cannot contribute to the Parks/Recreation Grounds typology if they are not freely publicly accessible and do not contribute to space available for informal recreation.

2. DM31 - Provision of Open Space, Sports and Recreational Buildings

PARKS AND RECREATION GROUNDS

The proposed joint standard for sports pitches and Parks/Recreation Grounds, for new provision, would not be effective. If the standard is adopted for both typologies, there is a clear risk that that sports pitches will continue to be prioritised over space for informal recreation; this has significant adverse implications for the future health and wellbeing of communities who, as we have seen in recent planning decisions, will have no access to multifunctional open space close to their homes.

As stated in relation to DM30 relating to existing provision, there is also no evidence to justify such a low standard for new provision. The DAP open space typologies are described in the same way as those included in the Fields in Trust document, 'Beyond the Six Acre Standard'. This Guidance is widely used by Local Authorities to form the basis of policies for access to open space, and in considering planning applications which affect open space. We would emphasise that these guidelines have separate standards for Parks and Gardens (0.80 hectares per 1000 population) and Outdoor Sports (1.60 hectares per 1,000 of the population), totaling 2.4 hectares per 1,000 of the population if the two typologies are brought together. The Council's DAP policy for such a low overall standard is therefore irrational and unjustified; this is a fundamental error, particularly in the context that many areas of the City are deficient in multifunctional open space.

We are also concerned that all of the Strategic Land Release sites allocated in the CSUCP – the majority of which have already been granted planning permission – have been approved with no provision of Parks/Recreation Grounds, nor any financial contribution to existing Parks provision. Most have, however, included financial contributions towards improvements to existing or new sports pitches which rarely have the multifunctional benefits of Parks. As standalone provision, pitches generally prohibit free public access and are

often used solely for organised team sports. A recent outline application relating to CSUCP Policy NN4 was justified against Open Space policies on the basis of the proximity of the application site to Havannah Nature Reserve. Local Nature Reserves are designated for their ecological importance and therefore cannot provide the level of multi-functionality offered by traditional parks.

Failure to consider Parks provision for growing communities associated with CSUCP allocations has occurred despite a robust policy framework provided by CSUCP policy CS18 and saved UDP Policy OS1.2, and relevant supplementary planning guidance that requires access to Parks within 10 minutes walk of home (Green Space, Sports and Recreation Addendum 2013). DAP para 6.17.1 refers to the Newcastle Open Space Assessment (NOSA) as providing an assessment of the current and future requirements for open space across the City. The DAP, however, fails to allocate land for new Parks provision, despite the findings of the NOSA which refers to the need for 26.16 hectares of new provision to meet the needs of the growing population and new neighbourhoods, based on applying the 0.80 ha per 1,000 of the population to the projected population growth (Table 16).

The NPPF (para 96) affirms that: *'Information gained from such assessments should be used to determine what Open Space, sports and recreational provision is needed, which plans should then seek to accommodate.'* The fact that the DAP is silent on this fundamental requirement represents a serious failure of the Plan, painting a bleak picture for future residents of CSUCP allocated housing sites, none of which will have the access the Parks standard referred to at table 3. We contend this error represents a serious inconsistency with the NPPF and demonstrates that the DAP will not deliver sustainable development, nor is it positively prepared.

Suggested Amendments:

- Urgent assessment needed to demonstrate how new CSUCP communities will be able to access Parks and Recreational Grounds, within the walking distances specified at DAP table 3.
- New Parks provision should then be identified on the DAP policies map, and by an urgent review of the recently published Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan.
- Separate standards needed as follows: 1 hectare per 1,000 of the population

for Parks and Recreation Grounds, and 1 hectare per 1,000 of the population for sports pitches.

- If the joint standard is retained, additional text is needed to make clear that fenced playing fields for team sports, with controlled public access, cannot contribute towards Parks or Recreation Grounds provision, simply because such provision does not allow for informal recreation. A joint standard, if adopted, should be 2 hectares per 1000 population.

- As per DM30 comments above, amend policy title to refer to 'Open Space, Sports and Recreational provision'.

CHILDREN'S PLAY

As stated in our representations to the draft submission DAP, we have seen numerous examples of children's play areas being shoe-horned in to open space at reserved matters stage; this means a commensurate reduction in amenity green space provision. In its response to our earlier DAP representations, the Council says such provision is not 'double counted', referring to the NOSA's Assessment of existing provision. However, every time an open space assessment accompanies a planning application children's play areas are subsumed in to the Local Open Space category, thus skewing overall levels of provision and resulting in a shortfall of informal open space.

Furthermore, officers dealing with planning applications for larger housing developments invariably condition the location of play areas, rather than identifying appropriate locations which can be integrated into the proposal at the outset. Not only does this approach mean that play areas are wedged in to locations that are not appropriate (for example, with a lack of natural surveillance), it also means that the overall level of informal green space provision, as originally approved, is infringed.

Suggested amendment:

Supporting text required to make it clear that the location of play areas will be considered early in the planning process and play space requirements will be considered separately to amenity green space requirements (in terms of applying the standards set out at DAP table 3).

NATURAL GREEN SPACE

Both Table 1 and Table 3 refer to ANGst standards for assessing access for both existing and new communities, which we support.

Suggested amendment:

A short explanation of the ANGst standards should be included in additional supporting text.

COMMUNAL FOOD GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

We support the encouragement of communal food growing opportunities but would like to see further clarity on provision, which should not infringe open space needs for informal recreation.

Suggested Amendment:

Additional text needed to clarify that any open space used for this purpose will be considered separately from open space typology needs, so that amenity green space provision is not infringed.