



Open Space Standards Evidence Report

February 2013

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1.0 Introduction and Policy Context

Introduction

- 1.1 Fenland District Council is producing the Fenland Core Strategy, which sets out the framework for how development will be considered across the District to 2031.
- 1.2 This Evidence Report (which is one of a collection) provides background information and justification for the open space standards as set out in Appendix B of the Core Strategy.
- 1.3 Natural greenspaces are very important to our quality of life. They provide a wide range of benefits for people and the environment.
- 1.4 Recent evidence shows that access to natural greenspaces for fresh air, exercise and quiet contemplation has benefits for both physical and mental health. Research provides good evidence of reductions in levels of heart disease, obesity and depression where people live close to greenspaces.
- 1.5 In addition to their potential ecological value, greenspaces also help us adapt to changes in climate through their role in reducing the risk of flooding and by cooling the local environment. Where trees are present they also act as filters for air pollution. Nature nearby is good for people, good for wildlife and good for the environment.

National Policy

- 1.6 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012.
- 1.7 Section 8 of the NPPF concerns “promoting healthy communities and the following paragraph (73) is particularly relevant:

“73 Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision. The assessments should identify specific needs and quantitative or qualitative deficits or surpluses of open space, sports and recreational facilities in the local area. Information gained from the assessments should be used to determine what open space, sports and recreational provision is required.”

- 1.8 The above NPPF guidance has been taken into account in preparing the Core Strategy as a whole, and in particular Policy CS7(g), Policy CS16(g) and Appendix B.

National Standards

- 1.9 **Natural Greenspace:** Natural England believes that everyone should have access to good quality natural greenspace near to where they live and have produced ‘Nature Nearby’ Accessible Natural Greenspace Guidance¹ to help people make this a reality.
- 1.10 The guidance is aimed at parks and greenspace practitioners and their partners, particularly decision makers, planners and managers of green space. It describes the amount, quality and level of visitor services that Natural England believe everyone is entitled to.
- 1.11 The guidance proposes the adoption of three key standards by greenspace professionals that will deliver high quality and inspiring visitor experiences in green spaces close to where people live, and connect people with the natural environment. The standards include the Accessible Natural Greenspace Standard (ANGSt).

¹ See link:

http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/regions/east_of_england/ourwork/gi/accessiblenaturalgreenspacestandardangst.aspx

- 1.12 ANGSt was developed in the early 1990's and was based on research into minimum distances people would travel to the natural environment. Natural England reviewed the standard in 2008 and concluded that it was still useful but that further guidance was required to explain how it should be applied. The **Nature Nearby** report published in 2010 provides this additional clarity.
- 1.13 ANGSt recommends that everyone, wherever they live, should have accessible natural greenspace:
- of at least 2 hectares in size, no more than 300 metres (5 minutes walk) from home;
 - at least one accessible 20 hectare site within two kilometre of home;
 - one accessible 100 hectare site within five kilometres of home; and
 - one accessible 500 hectare site within ten kilometres of home; plus
 - a minimum of one hectare of statutory Local Nature Reserves per thousand population.
- 1.14 ANGSt is a powerful tool in assessing current levels of accessible natural greenspace, and planning for better provision. The three underlying principles of ANGSt are:
- a) Improving access to greenspaces
 - b) Improving naturalness of greenspaces
 - c) Improving connectivity with greenspaces
- 1.15 **Allotments:** Away from ANGSt, the benefits of allotments are well established:
- providing a sustainable food supply
 - giving a healthy activity for people of all ages
 - fostering community development and cohesiveness
 - acting as an educational resource
 - providing access to nature and wildlife, and acting as a resource for biodiversity
 - giving open spaces for local communities
 - reducing carbon emissions by avoiding the long-distance transport of food.
- 1.16 The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) has produced a national allotment standard for a minimum provision of 20 standard plots of 250 square metres per 1,000 households or 0.5ha per 1,000 household.
- 1.17 **Formal Open Space:** Turning to play facilities, Fields in Trust (FIT) is the operating name of the National Playing Fields Association. *Planning and design for outdoor sport and play* updates and modernises previous recommendations made in 'The Six Acre Standard'. Since 'The Six Acre Standard' was last published in 2001, a range of more clearly defined and adopted policies for planning standards for open space, sport and recreation including outdoor facilities for sport and play have been published. In response to the changing policy context, and to reflect the need for local determination and adoption of standards relating to quantity, quality and accessibility, in 2006 Fields in Trust commissioned independent research to undertake a survey of local planning authorities and consult with key stakeholders around the United Kingdom.
- 1.18 It was decided that FIT should recommend Benchmark Standards to planning authorities and others. In 2008, FIT published – *Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play* with benchmark standards. These benchmark standards are recommended as a tool for assisting the development of local standards. The guidance states that the updated recommendations are very similar to previous recommendations in 'The Six Acre Standard'. A summary of the benchmark standards outlined by the document is set out below.
- 1.19 FIT concluded that the total recommended standard for outdoor sport is 1.6ha per 1,000 population, which is consistent with the previous Six Acre Standard.

- 1.20 **Children’s Play Space:** In addition to quantity standards for outdoor sports provision, the document also recommends standards for children’s playing space. Table 1 shows that benchmark standards of 0.8ha of children’s play space is recommended per 1,000 population. This is split into 0.25ha of designated equipped playing space (including fenced areas with play equipment) and a further 0.55ha of informal playing space, typically consisting of amenity space.

Table 1 – Quantity of All Playing Space

| Quantity of All Play Space | Benchmark Standards (ha per 1,000 population) |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Designated Equipped Playing Space | 0.25 |
| Informal Playing Space | 0.55 |
| Children’s Playing Space | 0.80 |

2. Fenland Context

- 2.1 Fenland regularly monitors its level of open space provision in the district. However, such detailed information is to be fully analysed and published via the forthcoming preparation of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). This SPD will further assist implementation of the more strategic Core Strategy open space policy and standards. .

3. Core Strategy Policy

- 3.1 In the Draft version of the Core Strategy (published for consultation in July 2011) and in the Further Consultation Draft (published for consultation in July 2012) there was reference to the need to provide open space but there were no set of specific standards proposed.
- 3.2 However, Fenland District Council recognises that open space is a key element of good planning, and a set of open space standards was felt to be helpful in ensuring a consistent approach to its provision.

Setting Open Space Standards: Types of Open Space

- 3.3 Having considered a wide range of evidence available on open space matters, Fenland District Council believes there are seven broad categories of open space, as follows:
- 3.4 **Country Park:** The purpose of a country park is to provide a place that has a natural, rural atmosphere for visitors who do not necessarily want to go out into the wider countryside. A country park requires a large landscaped setting which may include a variety of natural features, or formal planted areas. It is typically over ten hectares in size and provides for a wide range of recreational activities, including outdoor sports facilities and playing fields, and children’s play for different age groups.
- 3.5 **Neighbourhood / Town Park:** An area used by people of all ages for informal unstructured recreation such as walking, relaxing, or a focal point, ranging from formal planted areas and meeting places to wilder, more natural spaces, including green linkages
- 3.6 **Children’s Play:** Designated areas for outdoor play for children and young people. This will contain a range of facilities and an environment that has been designed to provide focused opportunities for outdoor play. This includes formal equipped play areas and provision for teenagers including wheeled sports parks and Multi Use Games Areas (MUGA’s).

- 3.7 **Natural Greenspace:** An area of woodland, shrubs, grassland, heath or moor, wetland or open water, where the public have a legal or permissive access
- 3.8 **Allotments:** An allotment is an area of land, leased either from a private or local authority landlord, for the use of growing fruit and vegetables. In some cases this land will also be used for the growing of ornamental plants, and the keeping of hens, rabbits and bees. An allotment is traditionally measured in rods (perches or poles), an old measurement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. 10 poles is the accepted size of an allotment, the equivalent of 250 square metres or about the size of a doubles tennis court.
- 3.9 **Outdoor Sports:** Facilities such as grass pitches for a range of sports, bowling green's tennis courts, athletics tracks and multi-use games areas plus ancillary facilities such as car park, changing and storage.
- 3.10 **Amenity Greenspace:** Small pockets of grass, trees or landscaped areas which are an integral part of the design and layout of the development. These areas are for informal activities close to home or work. Amenity space within development is a product of design, as explained in Paragraph A.10 of the Companion Guide to PPG17: "To some extent, the need for amenity greenspace is a function of population and therefore a population-based quantitative provision standard is appropriate. However, in many conservation areas and other highly valued developments, such as Georgian squares, the amount of amenity greenspace, and its distribution, was an outcome of the design. In particular, such greenspaces were the focus of the design, unlike many modern amenity greenspaces which are either those parts of sites which are unbuildable (for example because they are underlain by major utility services) or SLOAP ("Space Left Over After Planning"). At the same time, amenity greenspaces must always be highly accessible and therefore very close to where the people who will use them live or work. This suggests that higher quality local environments will result from the use of an urban design-led approach than from a simple quantitative provision standard."

Open Space Requirements

- 3.11 As the Core Strategy is a 'strategic' document, in line with expectations in the NPPF, Fenland District Council has not proposed at this stage to set very detailed open space standards for specific locations of the district based on detailed assessment of local neighbourhood needs or surplus provision of open space. This is intended to be done via a subsequent Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.12 Instead, the Council has decided on an approach whereby the expected provision of open space as part of new development schemes should:
- (a) as a starting point, meet national standards
 - (b) be adjusted should local evidence indicate it appropriate to do so (either up or down in certain categories of open space), further guided by the SPD once available, and
 - (c) be based on the principle that distance to an open space facility is just as important, if not more so, than area quantity provision per number of people it serves.
- 3.13 To make this process easier to calculate for developers, national standards have been converted into a more usable 'land take' set of standards, rather than a common approach found in other council's development plans of 'x per 1,000 population' or 'y within 300m of each home'. Fenland District Council find these latter two approaches as being complicated to calculate on the ground.

Calculating Open Space Standards

- 3.14 **Country Park:** ANGSt standards seek the provision of a very large country park (500ha) within 10 km of every home, or a more medium size one (100ha+) within 5km of every home. By their very nature, it is highly unlikely a development scheme will ever provide a

park of this sort of size, and it would be unrealistic to require individual developers to provide one (i.e. you cannot provide a 1/10th of a country park on site – you either provide one or you do not). The evidence suggests that of Fenland's market towns, March is most deficient in terms of large scale open space of a country park nature. March is also the central location of the district. It is therefore proposed that to move towards achieving the ANGSt standard for a country park that the Council seeks provision of one at March. Policy CS9 of the Core Strategy confirms this position.

- 3.15 In terms of a specific standard set out in the Core Strategy, it is proposed that contributions to the provision of a country park will come via CIL (if one is introduced) or via s106 for development schemes over 250 dwellings in March. The standards are limited to over 250 and to March only because of the forthcoming limitations in non-CIL pooling contributions from development sites.
- 3.16 **Neighbourhood / Town Park:** ANGSt standards require 2ha no more than 300m from home. In order to convert this standard in to a more meaningful and practical standard, the following calculation has been done.
- 3.17 First, let's assume a development site is round, with a 2ha circular park in the middle. A 2ha circular park would have a radius of 80m.
- 3.18 Second, if every home is to meet the 300m distance standard as proposed by ANGSt, then the development site would have to have a radius of 380m.
- 3.19 Third, a site with a 380m radius has a total site area of approximately 45ha.
- 3.20 Thus, for every 45ha development site, a well located park of at least 2ha is required, or for every 10ha of a development site the provision should be 0.45ha.
- 3.21 Where sites are large enough (say, 20ha or more, and certainly from 50ha or more), such sites should be provided on site as part of good planning. On smaller sites, contributions, either via CIL or S106, should be made.
- 3.22 **Children's Play:** FIT recommend 0.8ha/1,000 population, of which 0.25ha should be designated playing space. In order to convert this standard in to a more meaningful and practical standard, the following calculation has been done.
- 3.23 First, 1,000 population equates to 435 homes (based on the Fenland Census 2011 average of 2.3 people per home).
- 3.24 Second, assuming these 435 homes are developed at 30 dph, this gives a residential element of a site area of 14.5ha.
- 3.25 Third, if an assumption is made that only 70% of a typical development site is developable, then 14.5ha increases to a total development site of 21ha (i.e. 14.5ha is 70% of 21ha).
- 3.26 Thus, as a rule of thumb, a 20ha residential development site should result in a population of around 1,000 people.
- 3.27 And, therefore, for every 20ha development site, a well located children's play area of 0.80ha is required, or for every 10ha development site this equates to 0.4ha of children's play is required. Of this 0.4ha, around a third should be designated equipped playing space, and two-thirds informal play space.
- 3.28 **Natural Greenspace:** ANGSt sets a standard of 1 ha per 1,000 population for the provision of a local nature area. In order to convert this standard in to a more meaningful and practical standard, the following calculation has been done.
- 3.29 First, the same calculation as for Children's Play can be applied, arriving at a 20ha residential development site should result in a population of around 1,000 people.
- 3.30 And, therefore, for every 20ha development site, a natural greenspace of 1ha is required, or for every 10ha development site this equates to 0.5ha.

- 3.31 **Allotments:** NSALG national allotment standard is for a minimum provision of 20 standard plots of 250 square metres per 1,000 households or 0.5ha per 1,000 households. In order to convert this standard in to a more meaningful and practical standard, the following calculation has been done.
- 3.32 First, 1,000 households is assumed to equate to 1,000 dwellings.
- 3.33 Second, if it is assumed 1,000 dwellings are built at 30dph, that would equate to 48ha residential development site, or, using the 70% net developable area rule, a total site area of 68ha. As such, for each 68ha of development sites, 0.5ha would, as a minimum, be required to be set aside for allotments.
- 3.34 Third, Fenland District Council has, as is demonstrated by Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy, a desire to transform the health of its residents as well as take advantage if it exceptionally high agricultural land quality. It sees the provision of high quality allotments as a key element of this. It has therefore decided that the ratio should be 0.5ha of allotments per 50ha development site, around a 30% premium to the national minimum standard.
- 3.35 This therefore equates to 0.1ha per 10ha development site for allotments. New allotments will also require access and parking, and the standards proposed in the Core Strategy make reference to this.
- 3.36 **Outdoor Sports:** The national FIT standard of 1.6 ha per 1,000 population can be converted in to a meaningful and practical standard as follows.
- 3.37 First, the same calculation as for Children’s Play can be applied, arriving at a 20ha residential development site should result in a population of around 1,000 people.
- 3.38 And, therefore, for every 20ha development site, outdoor sports area of 1.6ha is required, or for every 10ha development site this equates to 0.8ha.
- 3.39 **Amenity Greenspace:** As explained earlier, no specific standard is proposed for this type of open space.

Total land area to be set aside for open space compared with other districts

- 3.40 If the full provision of open space is provided on site, without any adjustment for local circumstances, it would equate to 2.25ha per 10 ha, or possibly less, perhaps as low as 1.8ha, if certain types of open space (such as play) are found within a large open space (such as a town park).
- 3.41 If an average of 2.0ha per 10ha is taken, and on the basis that 10ha is likely to result in a population of around 500 people, the total implied ratio is 4.0ha per 1,000 population.
- 3.42 This figure can be compared with other district council standards, which normally set standards in this format (a format, as discussed above, is not one favoured by Fenland District Council because of the impracticalities of implementing it). A table is given at Appendix 1. This shows a relatively wide spread of standards, with 4.0ha within the range. This further justifies the approach being set by Fenland as being reasonable.

4. Alternative Reasonable Options

- 4.1 Option 1: No open space standard: This was the option that the Council pursued in earlier versions of the Core Strategy. However, with the publication of the NPPF in 2012 and comments received in general terms to the draft Core Strategy, this approach has since been rejected. It is clear that developers and the public require clear and tested open space standards within a development plan document.
- 4.2 Option 2: A more detailed policy/set of standards, based on a more thorough assessment of local need as suggested by para 73 of the NPPF. This has been rejected because it would be too detailed for a strategic plan such as the Core Strategy being proposed.

Instead, such detail, plus other implementation detail with respect to, for example, off-site contributions and commuted sums, will be set out in a forthcoming SPD.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 This Evidence Report demonstrates that Fenland District Council's Core Strategy policies for open space, and in particular the open space standards found at Appendix B, are entirely reasonable and appropriate response to the requirement of the NPPF. Alternative options have been considered, but rejected.
- 5.2 Overall, the Council considers its open space policy to be sound, but acknowledges that an SPD on this matter would be an essential follow up document to further aid detailed delivery of the policy.

Appendix 1: sample of open space standards of other authorities

| Typology | Amenity Green Space | Parks + Gardens | Natural Areas | Allotments | Outdoor Sports | Children / Youth Play Areas | Informal Spaces | Overall Green Space |
|--|---|-----------------------------|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---|
| Fenland | See details in this evidence report | | | | | | | Apx 4ha per 1,000 population |
| Cambridge City (Open Space and Recreation Strategy 2011) | Informal Open Space 2.2ha per 1,000 population | | | 0.4 ha per 1,000 population | 1.6 ha per 1,000 population | 0.3 ha per 1,000 population | | 4.1 ha per 1,000 population |
| Huntingdonshire DC (Development Management DPD - 2010) | | 0.48ha per 1,000 population | 0.23ha per 1,000 population | n/a | 1.61ha per 1,000 population | | | 3.73ha per 1,000 population |
| Peterborough City Council (Planning Policies DPD – 2012) | | 1.49ha per 1,000 population | 1ha per 1,000 population | 0.28ha per 1,000 population | 1.0ha per 1,000 population | These could be included within other provision such as parks and gardens | | 3.77ha per 1,000 population |
| South Cambridgeshire (Adopted SPD – Jan 2009) | | | | | 1.6ha per 1,000 population | 0.8ha per 1,000 population | 0.4ha per 1,000 population | 2.8ha per 1,000 population |
| South Holland (SPD – adopted June 2007) | n/a | n/a | | | 1.6/1.8ha per 1000 | 0.4-0.6ha per 1,000 population | 0.2-0.3ha per 1,000 population | 2.43ha per 1,000 population (6 acre standard) |
| Haringey London Borough Council (adopted SPD- March 2008) | | 1.65ha per 1,000 population | 1.82ha Local Nature Reserve per 1,000 population | 0.24ha per 1,000 population | 0.57ha per 1,000 population | 3 sqm per child | | 4.34ha per 1,000 population |