CORE STRATEGY CONSULTATION
Forward Planning
Development Services
Council Offices
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Church Walk
Clitheroe
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12th August 2011

www.sportengland.org

RE: Ribble Valley Core Strategy (Publication) Consultation

Thank you for giving Sport England the opportunity to make comment on the above document.

1. Legal Compliance

Sport England does not consider the Core Strategy to be legally compliant as it does not take into account paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework:

"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."

The lack of a robust Needs Assessment to underpin the Core Strategy policies was highlighted in Sport England's responses to the Regulation 25 and Proposed Revisions consultations.

However, there is positive wording within all open space related policies (DMG1 and DMB4) to ensure the protection of open space and playing fields. In both cases reference is made to "a robust assessment" but at present there is no robust up-to-date needs assessment. The key documents that make up the Core Strategy do not refer to an Open Space Assessment or similar.

2. Soundness

Sport England does not consider the Core Strategy to be compliant with national policy on the following grounds and therefore considers the Core Strategy to be unsound:

Paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework states:

"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."
The lack of a robust Needs Assessment to underpin the Core Strategy policies was highlighted in Sport England's responses to the Regulation 25 and Proposed Revisions consultations.

The following policies will require a robust and up to date Needs Assessment of open space, sport and recreation to ensure the policies comply to national policy and can be implemented over the core strategy period.

Policy DMG1 (General Considerations)  
Policy DM11 (Planning Obligations)  
Policy DMB4 (Open Space)

There is no evidence of a robust demand and supply led open space assessment having been carried out. Sport England are concerned that the wording within the policies requiring a needs assessment to justify the loss of open space does not make it clear where the responsibility lies. There is a concern that a needs assessment will be carried out by developers in support of planning applications covering small catchment areas unless the Council carries out a borough wide assessment. The NPPF makes it very clear the responsibility lies with the Council to undertake a Needs Assessment to underpin planning policies not the developers. Although Sport England agrees that it is the developer’s responsibility to demonstrate open space is surplus to requirement in the event the Local Authority has no up to date assessment, this does not negate the need for a Local Authority to carry out such an assessment. Developer led assessments should be the exception not the rule. Local Authorities should not rely on Developers to carry out ad hoc assessments as this leads to inconsistency in provision across the Local Authority area.

Needs Assessments should be used to determine:

- Which sites should be protected and enhanced
- Which sites can either be allocated for a different type of open space or be developed
- Where new open space provision should be focussed based on assessment of proposed growth areas
- Develop local standards for new development
- Assess the appropriate level of developer contributions

Although playing fields are specifically referred to in the Core Strategy they are treated in the same manner as other typologies of open space. Again this approach differs to the NPPF which considers playing fields separately from other types of open space, sport and recreation facilities as set out in paragraph 74. It also differs from the general Government approach to playing fields. For example, Sport England was made a statutory consultee in relation to developments affecting playing fields, and referral mechanisms put in place, due to specific concerns about their loss. No similar arrangements have been put in place for other typologies. Playing fields have a different unit of demand (teams rather than individuals) with which to assess need and for this reason Sport England strongly advocate carrying out a Playing Pitch Strategy in order to assess current and future demand and supply.

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The implementation of the policy DMI1 is intended to be one of the key delivery mechanisms for securing infrastructure and open space as specified within the policy. However, it is likely that in practice the ability to secure planning obligations in relation to open space would be extremely limited in the absence of an up to date open space, sport and recreation study.

There is some concern that referring to existing open space as shown on the Proposals Map within policy DMB4 depends on a robust audit that accurately identifies these areas. Audits are a snap shot in time and any areas that are currently proposed but not yet delivered or areas of playing field that may be newly provided as a consequence of new development during the Core Strategy period would not be included. As the Core Strategy covers a substantial time period this statement would not cover newly created open space and playing fields creating a loop hole for developers.

3. Suggested Amendments

Insert a statement that commits the Local Authority to undertaking a robust Needs Assessment across all open space typologies within a defined time period.

Yours faithfully,