

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 19 JULY 2011
title: PUBLIC OPEN SPACE AND RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To advise Members of the Council's current guidance on the provision of public open space and to encourage member involvement in the development of new policies/guidance to support the Core Strategy and delivery of development proposals.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions – this report relates to the Council ambitions of making peoples lives safer and healthier and helping to protect and enhance the local environments.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Core Strategy is a central planning document within the Local Development Framework that will ultimately replace the current Districtwide Local Plan. Key policies relating to open space are being formulated and further detailed guidance to enable this implementation will need to be developed.

2.2 Although responsibilities for the development of the new strategy lies with Planning and Development Committee, the provision of public open space on new residential sites has a potential impact on this Committee, as it has historically taken over responsibility for such spaces (play areas etc), through the provision of a commuted sum from the developer.

2.3 As Members can imagine, the negotiation of such arrangements is complex as no site is the same and many other factors such as existing local provision can be taken into account. Coupled with no detailed policies/guidance it has meant that each site has been dealt with on an individual basis, making it difficult to take a strategic overview of open space provision across the borough and exposing the Council, and this Committee to long term revenue expenditure.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The remaining policy from the Districtwide Local Plan is Policy RT8 and it states:

“On all residential sites over one hectare, the layout shall be expected to provide adequate and visible open space. The Council will also negotiate for provision on smaller sites, and secure a contribution towards provision of sport and recreation facilities on public open space within the area where the overall level of supply is inadequate”.

- 3.2 The number of houses that can be accommodated on one hectare varies depending on housing type but, on average, would probably involve up to 30 properties.
- 3.3 Public open space has a very broad definition and could include very informal areas such as a grassed area to more structured facilities such as children's play areas.
- 3.4 National guidance for the provision of public open space clearly states the need for a detailed analysis of what exists in order to understand what future provision is required. Previously, guidance was issued on national standard although this has been overtaken by the requirement to set local evidence based standards.
- 3.5 Within the Council there are a range of documents that identify areas of open space. They have been compiled for different reasons and use different standards/terminology. There is therefore some work to be carried out to pull these together and identify any gaps. There will then need to be an assessment of that existing provision, potential population grants and the emergence of gaps.
- 3.6 This Committee will also have to consider its ability to take on the future management of any new open spaces, given the financial constraints we currently find ourselves in.

4 ISSUES

- 4.1 In the longer term it will be important for Committee to be confident that future open space provision both compliments and enhances what is currently provided and does not place undue financial pressures on the Council. It would therefore be useful if representatives from both Community and Planning and Development Committees set up a working group to develop policies/guidance to inform the delivery of the Core Strategy, but also to enable the Council to respond to existing development pressure.
- 4.2 Members need to consider whether current policies/practice give sufficient detail/direction to assist in negotiations on any interim applications, particularly as the Core Strategy will not be in place for around 12 months and the number and scale of applications in the meantime are likely to be significant.
- 4.3 Area Members may wish to consider are:
- Whether the one hectare rule is sufficient or should be expanded on
 - Whether we should be more specific on the type of open space eg formal/informal, age related
 - Whether developers should take full responsibility for both provision and future management

5 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – on a positive note commuted sums from developers help to provide additional facilities to what the Council would normally be able to provide. The down side however is that such sums do not last forever and at some time in the future the burden of operating facilities passes to the Council.
 - Technical, Environmental and Legal – it is important that any proposals moving forward have been arrived at via a robust procedure and are backed up by a strong evidence base in order to minimise challenges by future developers.

- Political – robust policy/guidance will help the Council achieve a greater commitment/contribution from developers.
- Reputation – as many developments will have some controversy attached to them, securing additional recreation/open space facilities for the immediate community will be a positive factor.

6 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

- 6.1 Note the contents of the report.
- 6.2 Agree to the formation of a joint working group to develop future open space policies in the new Core Strategy.
- 6.3 Suggest any changes/additions to current policies/guidance as an interim measure.

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

For further information please ask for Chris Hughes, extension 4479.